Nuffield Science Bursary for second year student Helen Crawford

This summer, Helen Crawford was awarded an undergraduate research bursary from The Nuffield Foundation to carry out a research project with Dr Hannie van Hooff and Prof Mark van Vugt. These bursaries pay £175 per week and enable students in the middle years of their degree to take part in a defined research project for six to eight weeks of the summer vacation. They are aimed at students who are considering a research career and offer them an opportunity to get first hand experience in a particular science area. Applications for such bursaries need to be made by University staff together with a motivated and capable student. More information about this scheme can be found at: http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/go/grants/nsbur/

Helen was chosen from a number of other students to work on a unique project combining evolutionary psychology with cognitive neuroscience. In this project, reaction time data and brain activity recordings were collected from 20 males and 20 females to investigate gender differences in attentional biases related to human mate preferences. Data still needs to be analysed in more detail but preliminary findings suggest that participants paid more attention to attractive faces of the opposite sex than unattractive ones, even though these faces were irrelevant for task performance (i.e. they were more distracted by them). This attention pattern occurred automatically at a very early stage of information processing and, in agreement with evolutionary theory, seemed more pronounced for males than females. In addition, brain activity patterns suggest that this difference in attention might have different origins for males and females. That is, compared to a set of other faces, male participants were found to pay more attention to attractive faces while female participants were found to pay less attention to unattractive faces.

Helen played a vital role in the development and validation of the face stimuli, which was done with the support of Brian Spisak (a PhD student). She received training in EEG recording and collected the data from all 40 participants, which is a tremendous job! She was involved in some of the data analyses and will contribute to the writing of a scientific paper. According to Helen “the opportunity to be involved in every stage of an experiment of this kind has been such a valuable experience. This project has given me background knowledge and experience that will greatly help me as I conduct my final year project. It was an enjoyable 8 weeks and I felt proud to be an important member of the research team. Investigating the differences between male and female mate preference and observing their reactions to faces of the opposite sex was both amusing and enlightening. The experience of carrying out the experiment myself has increased both my interest and confidence in this field of psychology significantly, and I have learned many new and surprising things about how the brain works.

The skills that I have learned, such as EEG recording and analysis will help me when applying for postgraduate courses and research employment, not to mention look good on my C.V. I strongly recommend the Nuffield Bursary experience to second year students because research experience of any kind will vastly benefit future careers. I would like to thank Hannie and Mark for being so supportive and pleasant to work with throughout.”

Examples of some of the computer-generated face stimuli that were used in the experiment. Can you spot the attractive ones?

Psychology Society

The Psychology Society is a great way to get a glimpse into how psychology works in the real world and to meet fellow students. We have lots planned for you this year with speakers from all different areas of psychology every Tuesday at 6.30pm in KLT6. This month the talks will be on schizophrenia, counselling and C.B.T.

This term we have also planned a careers day, a work experience evening, a trip to the BPS London Lectures and some socials so that you can get to know one another. It costs £5 to join the society for the year. For this you can attend all the events and get discount on our book sales and trips.

The Society recently hosted a pub quiz, which was a great success. Well done to Emily Townsend and her team for organising the event.

Congratulations to the XOs who won the quiz. Well done to the staff team, A1, for coming a creditable joint second. Representing the staff were Gary Samson, Amanda Bates, Kate Mansfield, Graham Reynolds and James Burr. Sharing second place was the A-Team followed by Team Emma, Team Lynsey and the Loony Toons.

To find out more information or to view the schedule of events visit: www.kentpsychology.co.uk.
One of our Erasmus students shares her experiences so far

Iga Grzegrzolka – Erasmus student from Warsaw, Poland studying Post Graduate modules in the Department of Psychology

"First of all, I am very delighted by the campus itself – it’s a small student city with shops, pubs, a cinema, a theatre, clubs, bank services, a sports centre and much more! The Canterbury Campus creates a unique atmosphere for student life: living together, learning together, playing sports, partying – a fantastic experience which probably results in the creation of life long friendships, attending a variety of social groups and, consequently, developing important social abilities, self confidence and creating a social identity. Polish universities don’t promote such a big scale gathering.

Another characteristic of the University of Kent is the diversity of students and staff. In Poland, although accepting of more and more international students, is still quite unusual to meet such a big scale gathering.

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Well done Lizanne!

The Department’s newly-appointed Administrator is Lizanne Alcock, who has worked at the University of Kent for over 15 years. Prior to taking on her new role, Lizanne worked as the Administrative Assistant responsible for undergraduate admissions, the newsletter and timetabling in the Department, amongst other things. However, when she joined the Department in November 2006, she was no stranger to Psychology, having spent four years previously administering two grants for Professor Diane Houston.

The Research Experience Scheme

This year the Department of Psychology has started a new initiative: the Research Experience Scheme for Stage 2 students, and I am delighted to announce that it has been well received so far. During this first term, 19 students are working with 9 members of staff. The questions are broad and directed at issues as diverse as the nature and consequences of conspiracy theories, the effect of mental simulation, the role of emotions in moral judgements, the nature of instructed forgetting, and many other topics.

Whether someone is planning to use this opportunity to get some insight into a specific area of research, whether the goal is to improve one’s methodological and communication skills, or whether the intention is to try out something different and new, there will be plenty of room for initiative in all these and many other directions. If you find that some aspect of the scheme is not yet exactly perfect and needs improvement, let us know! This is our first round and we are still in the process of finding and working on the most suitable format. For example, we are thinking about a “Research Day” at the end of the year. Those who are interested to share insights about the project - and possibly present some preliminary findings would then have an opportunity to present a poster, get some outside feedback and possibly inform future Stage 2 students about their own experience. If you have any thoughts and suggestions, let us know - your comments will be much appreciated. Overall, I hope you will benefit from this initiative. If you would like to join at a later point, future application deadlines during the 2008-09 academic year are January 30th and May 15th.

Ulrich Weger

Karen Douglas- Associate Editor

“Being an editor is a really important job because it puts you in a position to help influence the overall shape of the discipline. Having so many editors in our department, especially at such prestigious journals, means that we play a significant role in determining how psychology develops internationally”

Professor Richard Crisp
Head of Department

From January 2009, Karen Douglas will work as an Associate Editor for two major social psychology journals: the European Journal of Social Psychology and Social Psychology.

Many Social Psychology Staff at the University of Kent are on editorial boards for a selection of major Journals- this is fantastic news for us as a Department.

“I think that my time at the University of Kent is not only valuable, but a fantastic experience”.

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Many Social Psychology Staff at the University of Kent are on editorial boards for a selection of major Journals- this is fantastic news for us as a Department.
Congratulations to....

Vanessa Walsh, who won the Tony Gale Memorial Prize, which is awarded by the BPS Wessex Branch. Vanessa received a cheque for £100 for the best dissertation in the Psychology Department. We wish Vanessa every success in her future career.

Evangelos Chaikalis who has been awarded an EASP travel grant of 800 euros. Vage will spend this money on a 3-month stay in New York where he will be working with Prof John Jost on a new research project. Good luck Van!

Theresa Gannon for being awarded a grant of £7,315 from Nuffield Foundation to carry out research entitled "Violent social information processing: an experimental study".

Ulrich Weger for being awarded an ESRC Small Research Grant of £79,995 to carry out the project titled "Having to start all over again? The consequences of interruptions".

Olga Zubko for being awarded a study visit grant worth £1,200 by the Experimental Psychology Society. The money will enable her to spend time in David Wilkinson’s collaborator’s clinical laboratory at Harvard Medical School. Olga will go for 8-12 weeks next Easter.

Dominic Abrams & Tirza Leader who have been granted £20,028 to carry out ‘Project Sphinx’. Consultation for Port Authority, Dover, UK, researching psychological techniques for the purpose of enhancing port defense and criminal profiling.

Dominic Abrams, Adam Rutland and Tirza Leader for their Consultation for Communities and Local Government, UK, evaluating role model messages for REACH communities and Local Government, UK, researching psychologi

Congratulations Charlotte Simms, who gave birth to Kitty Martha at 4.40 pm on the 9th of October. Charlotte describes her baby as perfect with loads of hair. The baby arrived in under two hours and weighed 7lb 8 ozs.

Charlotte has worked alongside Professors Lyn Quine and Derek Rutter previously.

A New Baby Girl!

Tirza Leader who has been awarded £700 for her ‘Omega-3 Study’. Consultation for 3A Business Consulting, DK, testing the market potential of omega-3 supplements.

Lindsey Cameron who has just been awarded £74,199 from Race Equality Sandwell for a project entitled “Tackling racism amongst adolescents: a route to greater well-being”.

The Rotary Prize Winners. The Faculty Prizes Committee considered all eligible students within the faculty for the Stage 1 Rotary Prize 2007-2008 awarded for performance in recent Stage 1 examinations. The prize is awarded each year to a number of students who obtain outstanding results, and is a considerable achievement.

Well done to:

Miss Natalija K Dusznyska-Stanley, Miss Catherine Z Hill, Miss Amy Smallridge-Smith, Miss Julie Van De Vyver, Mr Ben Geeves, Mr James Grant, Miss Helen Shannoon, Mr Alexander Barber, Miss Sarah Grantham, Miss Jennifer Ashton, Mr Harry J Musson, Miss Laura Scott, Miss Jessica A Grout, Mr Joseph B Connell

A New Baby Girl!

Welcome back James Burr

James is one of the trusty technical staff within the Psychology Department who joins us every term time to help you guys out!

The technical support team; Keith, Graham and Gary usually welcome James back with open arms after a long summer apart. This year was no exception when James discovered his desk has been slightly misplaced.

above: James’ desk before the move

above: James looking slightly confused about his new desk positioning

Recent Publications


Open Day Success!

Many thanks to all those that helped to make the Open Day on the 4th of October a great success. We had superb weather and received a large amount of interest from prospective students.

All the newsletters ran out quickly and, thanks to the team, we managed to collect a list of around 50 students that we could contact after the Open Day and send our newsletters to.

Thanks to Tim Hopthrow for doing the Open Day talk, Georgina Randsley De Moura, Sofia Stathi, Tirza Leader, Lindsey Cameron, Mike Forrester, Lianne Alcock, Amanda Bates, Dirk Janssen, Ulrich Weger, Nicolas Dumay and Theresa Gannon.

Well done everyone!
A Huge Thank you from Angie and a Diary of her last days in Peru

Muchas gracias! I’m back from Peru, and I can’t believe that this 6 month journey is over! Please consider this my final and most heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported Anthony Nolan (and me!) on our quest. Together we raised over £3100 for donor support and recruitment, which will hopefully have an important impact for people awaiting bone marrow or stem cell transplants.

Let me tell you about the trip:

Day 1: London-Madrid-Lima. I finally met my 25 fellow trekkers at 5am in Heathrow airport. We flew (2 hours to Madrid, 11 hours to Lima) all day, and arrived in Lima for a short overnight.

Day 2: Ah, jetlag! I woke up at 4am and went for a VERY dark stroll to the waterfront with another trekker who couldn’t sleep. By 9am, we were on a flight to Cusco (3300m) for acclimatisation.

Day 3: We got up, and to assist our acclimatisation, visited Inca ruins at Pisac, a site in the Sacred Valley. We got in a short walk at higher altitude to prepare for the next day.

Day 4: Up at dawn to take a bus to our trail head. We began our trek at Huarorcondo (3400m) with an incline to 3900m for lunch, followed by a sloping descent to our first camp site at a small rural school.

Day 5: One of the hardest days. We began at 3500m with an immediate, steep uphill to our highest point of the trek at 4700m. After 3 hours of non-stop uphill, we reached the summit for a few pictures and an immediate descent to avoid problems with the altitude. The downhill was incredibly steep, and for me, worse than the incline. After lunch, we had a more even hike along the Silque Valley to camp, arriving very early at 4.30.

Day 6: Began with a 4 hour strenuous addition to our planned route. Given our general fitness and speed, our guides brought us to see a beautiful, green, glacial-fed lake. We doubled back, revisiting camp, to begin our planned trek by 11AM. The afternoon was a gentle ‘Peruvian flat’ along the Silque River Valley approaching Mount Veronica. We still got to camp by 5.00.

Day 7: Was an easy day in preparation for the strenuous and timed hike to Machu Picchu the next day. It only took us three hours to get to camp (should have taken 4 or 5, I love us), and in anticipation of that, we got to sleep in until 7.00. By ‘we got to sleep in until 7.00,’ I mean most people slept until then. I, of course, was wide awake by 4.30.

According to our guides, we were the first group to get 100% of our trekkers to this point, we had an incredibly fast speed to camp, we had a good dynamic, and we were generally in better health than any group they could remember. Like I said, we were pretty much awesome. Our reward? Wait for it, wait for it…

Day 8: Our triumphant finale. We took a train a ways down the valley to join the actual Inca Trail. We needed to get from 2100m (Machu Picchu is much lower than the rest of our hike, in a more tropical cloud forest) to 2600m in under 3 hours to reach checkpoints before they closed. Successfully doing so (was there ever any question?)

“we had a more leisurely walk from the sungate into the ruins which was a very surreal experience”

Day 9: After an overnight in an ACTUAL BED in Aguas Calientes, we went back up to Machu Picchu for a tour. That a civilization without the wheel could construct this and all other Inca sites in under 100 years is overwhelming. The stone work is impressively precise, and being so high up a steep mountain… I don’t even want to think about how they got the work done.

Overall, I’ve realised that I need to redefine the idea of ‘perfection.’ My version now includes the components ‘possible’ and ‘Peruvian.’ I’m so grateful to have this experience as part of my life story and I hope you’ve enjoyed reading about it. If you’ve been inspired or entertained, please realise that you can still contribute to Anthony Nolan. Contact me for details: A.Maitner@kent.ac.uk

Wishing everyone health and happiness.

Warmly,

Angie

Your Student Advisor

“University can be fun and exciting but it can also feel a bit overwhelming at times. So if you’re worried about anything at all then please contact me. You can also approach me for advice relating to health issues or social problems - I will always do my best to help you out!”

The Department is committed to offering the best possible support and guidance to students, and monitors student progress carefully, so that help can be given early.

Amanda Bates is your Student Advisor. If you would like to speak to Amanda you can either call in to a Drop-in Session in Keynes A1.02 10am-12noon and 2pm-4pm daily (except Wednesday morning) or make an appointment by emailing psychadvisor@kent.ac.uk or through the Psychology Student Office (Keynes M1.13).

Kent Psychologist

The Department 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 Lianne Allcock.

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