Professor Dominic Abrams Awarded Prestigious Titles

We are pleased to announce that Prof Dominic Abrams has been awarded the 2009 British Psychological Society President’s Award. The award is given by the BPS as mid-career recognition of exceptional contributions to psychological knowledge and is regarded as one of the highest accolades a UK psychologist can receive.

In addition to this, Dominic has also been appointed to the ESRC Research Grants board and to the governing council of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. His role in the ESRC is quite substantial and involves assessing around 80 proposals a year.

Dominic has contributed greatly to the field of Psychology, serving as Secretary of the BPS Social Psychology Section and as Chair of the BPS Research Board. He has also been Secretary of the European Association of Experimental Psychology and is a Council member on SPSSI and an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Welcome to New Staff

The School of Psychology is pleased to welcome five new members of staff to the team. Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith, Dr Heather Ferguson, Dr Erika Nurmsoo, Dr Eduardo Vasquez and Dr Mario Weick have all been appointed as lecturers.

Heather obtained an MA (Hons.) in Psychology from the University of Glasgow in 2003, followed by an ESRC-funded Masters and PhD investigating how readers make sense of counterfactual statements. For example, “If I had won the lottery last week, I would be in Bali today!” In 2007 she moved to London for an AHRC-funded post-doctoral position at University College London to investigate various aspects of spoken communication, before joining the Psychology Department at Kent as a Lecturer in October 2009.

Heather’s primary research interest is in Cognitive Psychology. She is particularly interested in the interface between cognitive processes and social interaction, specifically the way that we understand and predict events in terms of other peoples’ perspectives during communication (e.g. their intentions, beliefs and desires). She has been using a variety of techniques, including eye-movements, event-related brain potentials and reaction times to address issues such as: how quickly can we adopt other peoples’ perspectives? What happens when other peoples’ knowledge of the world is at odds with our own? How do we separate reality from fantasy (say, in a fictional novel) and why do they get muddled up sometimes?

Eduardo attended the University of California, Los Angeles for his undergraduate work in psychology, and he earned his Ph.D. in Social Psychology at the University of Southern California, also in Los Angeles. His research training included a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Missouri to conduct research on alcohol and social behaviours.

Eduardo has a relatively wide range of research interests, though he focuses primarily on aggression and violence. A second area of interest for him is intergroup relations, which includes prejudice, bias, and the processes involved in interactions between members of different groups. Additionally, Eduardo combines and expands on these areas of inquiry and conducts research on intergroup conflict and aggression, including inter-gang violence. Moreover, he assesses how alcohol and alcohol priming impact various social behaviours related to aggression, inter-group anxiety and prejudice, and sexual harassment.

We look forward to informing you about the research interests of our new lecturers Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith, Dr Erika Nurmsoo and Dr Mario Weick when they officially join us soon.

New Student Advisor

I know that Amanda will be a hard act to follow but I am hopeful that as a Kent Psychology graduate, I will have some insight into students’ experiences. I am really looking forward to meeting everyone at the start of the new term and wish you all lots of luck for the next academic year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries or problems, academic or otherwise. I may not have all the answers but I usually know someone who does. My contact details and times are detailed below:

psychadvisor@kent.ac.uk
01227 824771
Office Hours: Daily from 10 - 12 and 2 - 4 (except Wednesday mornings)
The Psychology Society 2009

Final Year student Claire Rubin gives a run down of her experiences of being a part of the Psychology Society and what to expect in 2009.

In my first year of university, my main aims were to pass my exams and to make friends. Despite initially setting my sights a little low, I did do my work and ensured that I always made the deadline, ensuring a 2:1 at the end of the year. However, as there are no seminars (depending on what wild modules you choose, in my case, forensic science), I found it very hard to make friends with students from my own course, and so at the end of the year decided to join the Psychology society as an ordinary committee member (OCM). This meant that I could take part in all of the meetings, inputting my opinions and offering any help to other members with their roles. This year I decided to stand for the position of the publicity and communications officer. This role entails emailing all of the society members, letting them know about our upcoming talks, which we hold every Tuesday evening, and socials which take place every month.

The president of the society (this year, Emily Townsend) books guest speakers to come in every week including talks on schizophrenia, obesity, anorexia, drama therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and many more. We then have drinks in K-bar afterwards, with drinks promotions. Larger socials, such as quizzes and scavenger hunts take place every month and the society also offers around two trips a term. Last year we teamed up with the Critical Thinking and research/crsc/index.html  

Questions and Approaches” in August on “Consciousness and Intentionality: New Approaches” in August 2010. The centre does not only provide a context for research and teaching but is also a platform for wider activities such as a new fortnightly student-discussion group: “The nature and value of initiative” to which all are welcome. The Centre will also host an interdisciplinary conference on “Consciousness and Intentionality: New Questions and Approaches” in August 2010.

This year the Psychology Society has a brand new President and lots of new faces among the committee members. This year is going to be even bigger and better with more socials and better than ever talks and careers events to help you on your way to a career in psychology or simply to broaden your interests. Come and visit our stand at the Fresher’s fair on 24th September and pick up this terms planner, showing you all the socials and talks we have in store.

Enjoy your first year, after working so hard to get into university, you deserve it!

New Centre for Research on Social Climate

The School of Psychology has a new Research Centre – the Centre for Research on Social Climate. The centre was set up to investigate how social conventions frame and constrain human behaviour. Such conventions are universal in daily life, as Dr Ulrich Weger, the centre’s director, points out: “Such conventions are the collection of opinions, experiences and values in a given context. They are not necessarily a reflection of how things really are; instead, they often express how we like to see things. In fact, such conventions can be quite onesided, yet they influence our views, our theories and our understanding of a given phenomenon. We want to learn more about the consequences of such conventions because ultimately they inform and shape our thinking and behaviour.”

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An opening lecture will take place at 4pm on Thursday, November 12th in KLT4 (Keynes College).

More details can be found via a link on the School of Psychology’s website or directly under: http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/research/crsc/index.html

To find out more about the range of Postgraduate Psychology courses we offer, please visit the webpage below: http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/why-pg.html

International Scholarship Winner

The School of Psychology would like to congratulate Jennifer Lord on being awarded the Postgraduate International Scholarship. Below, Jennifer talks about why she chose Kent’s Masters in Social & Applied Psychology programme.

As an undergraduate student from the United States, I have explored the social sciences from many perspectives. In addition to my degree in Psychology, I have taken extensive classes in Sociology and Statistics. I had the opportunity to work closely with researchers in the areas of cognitive, cultural and social psychology as well as with those in the areas of both classical and contemporary sociology. This research provided me with ample opportunities to not only participate in collecting the data, but also in designing studies, analyzing data and writing and presenting the findings at conferences.

After graduation I began looking for a postgraduate program that would both draw upon and challenge my wide-ranging background. I was most interested in the research I conducted in the area of group dynamics; I also knew that I wanted a program with a strong quantitative emphasis. When I was introduced to the University of Kent by a professor, I knew instantly that Kent provided the platform I was looking for to advance my knowledge and set me in the right direction to achieve a successful professional career. As an international student, however, I knew it would only be possible to follow the opportunity offered by Kent if I was able to secure a scholarship. I was obviously delighted to discover that just that had occurred when I was informed I would receive the International Masters Scholarship. As the end of the summer draws near my time in the United States is coming to an end and I am enthusiastically awaiting my first semester at the University of Kent and all the challenges and excitement that accompanies both living and studying abroad.

To find out more about the range of Postgraduate Psychology courses we offer, please visit the webpage below: http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/why-pg.html
Congratulations to Prof Richard Crisp who has been promoted to Reader. Joachim joined the department in 2004. His field of research is personality and individual differences where he has established an internationally acclaimed research programme on perfectionism (see Science for the Public). Moreover, he is chief editor of Anxiety, Stress, & Coping.

Joachim’s research on positive perfectionism was prominently cited in the July issue of American Scientific Mind. In an article entitled “Can you be too perfect?” (see http://bit.ly/LW778), Joachim, who has published widely in the field, was quoted saying: “A lot of good craftsmen, mechanics, surgeons probably would be considered perfectionistic. If you’re happy and functional, there’s no reason to worry about it.” However, Joachim admitted that the issue of positive perfectionism remains controversial. “Perfectionists are more ego-involved in everything they do,” and if things go wrong, they may experience more negative affect (e.g., shame, guilt) than non-perfectionists.

Joachim recently gave an interview to Thomson Reuters ScienceWatch.com (http://sciencewatch.com/). A recent analysis of Essential Science Indicators had indicated that ASC is having an increasing impact in the field of psychiatry and psychology. In the interview, Dr Joachim Stoeber and Aleksandra Lucynska (co-editor-in-chief) explained how they account for the ASC’s increased citation rate, what specific developments they see in the fields served by ASC, and how they see their field evolve in the next few years. (Read the complete interview at http://bit.ly/1NejvT.)

Dr Tendayi Viki will be away for the 2009-2010 academic year. He was awarded a visiting fellowship by Stanford University and is spending the year there with his family.

Congratulations to Prof Dominic Abrams and Prof Adam Rutland who have been awarded £115,675 from The British Academy for a project entitled “The role of group status and social norms in children’s peer exclusion behaviour”.

The School of Psychology would like to offer their warm congratulations to PhD student Kerry Wood and her husband James on the arrival of their son Alexander. Their handsome baby boy, pictured below, was born on 15th June and the family are all doing very well.

Congratulations to Prof Dominic Abrams and Dr Lindsey Cameron who has been awarded a research grant for £17,399 from the World Education Development Group for a project entitled “My Dad says…..”.

As well as the simplified Chinese language translation earlier this year, now a “complex characters” Chinese version of Prof Richard Crisp’s Essential Social Psychology has been published. (Pictured below)

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Dr Lindsey Cameron has been invited to visit Dr Veronica Benet-Martinez at the University of California.

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Recent Publications


Crisp, R. J., Hutter, R. C., & Young, B. (2009). When mere exposure leads to less liking: The incremental threat effect in intergroup contexts. British Journal of Psychology, 100, 133-149.


Farewell Amanda

The School of Psychology said farewell to Amanda Bates, Psychology Student Advisor, this summer. Amanda joined the school in 2007 and was a fantastic member of the team, bringing her brilliant energy and willingness to help in any situation. We wish her great success in the future. Amanda had this to say about her time in the School of Psychology:

I still can’t believe that I have left the Department for good! I can honestly say that it was a real pleasure working with so many of you and I wish you all the very best in your future studies and careers. I know that I have left the job in great hands, and I would like to thank you all for your kind messages of support - I will miss you.

Welcome Week Activities

The new first year Psychology students had a very busy Welcome Week this year. They’ve enjoyed K Bar, met the Psychology staff, taken part in Psychology research and refuelled with a BBQ in Keynes courtyard.

New undergraduate and postgraduate students were invited to round off Welcome Week with a lunchtime snack in the sunshine (pictures below). This gave students an opportunity to catch-up with their lecturers and introduce themselves to each other in a relaxed atmosphere. Lecturer, Dr David Wilkinson, chatted to students about his recent sports injury (pictured below).

Undergraduate Prizewinners

Congratulations to Rose Meleady for being awarded the British Psychological Undergraduate Award 2008; this was given for the highest overall grade upon graduation!

Well done to Erin Middleton, Katherine Williams and Nicole Wager who were all given the Janet Miele Prize 2009 in recognition of their great work on their final year research projects.

The Faculty Prize was awarded to Amy King, Katie Hallmark, Lisa Clark and Rhea Young for their outstanding performances in Stage Two and final year examinations.

Congratulations to Robert Brotherton for winning the Stage Two and Final Year Rotary Prize for his exceptional performance in Stage Two and final year examinations.

Rose Meleady was also awarded the Edward A Lamb Prize for her considerable achievement in Stage Two and final year examinations.

We would also like to congratulate Hema Chaplin, Elizabeth Hunt and Jessica Sandy for being awarded a Faculty Prize for their performances in the recent Stage One examinations.

Students volunteered to take part in a Mock Jury task (pictured above).

The School of Psychology also organised a Treasure Hunt for new students (pictures below); they familiarised themselves with campus and the winners were given two sizeable tins of chocolate!

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 Carly Bloomfield.

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