Welcome to the September issue of the Kent Psychologist, the School of Psychology’s newsletter.

The start of the new academic year is always exciting—and this year, for me personally, this is especially so because I have just taken over as the new Head of School. I have now been here for seven years enjoying the School’s excellent research facilities and high standards for teaching, and so I jumped at the chance to become Head of the great team of researchers, support staff and students that make the School of Psychology one of the UK’s most vibrant and most successful places to study psychology.

In 2011 we were ranked 13th out of all UK psychology departments in The Complete University Guide league table and 5th in the Telegraph’s top 10 Psychology courses. Additionally we had 89% student satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2011; and in the Guardian, we were rated 8/10 for “value added” and ranked 7th in terms of the proportion of graduates finding graduate-level employment, or full-time study, within six months of graduation.

Moreover, our academic staff continue to publish groundbreaking research, and we have journal editors, textbook writers and award winners all within our midst. I am very much looking forward to working with everyone and, as it is the beginning of a new term, wish all new students a warm welcome to the School. I am sure you will greatly enjoy and profit from your studies here at the School.

With the very best wishes,

Joachim Stoeber, Head of School

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This summer I was awarded an undergraduate research bursary from The Nuffield Foundation to carry out a research project with Dr Heather Ferguson. 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.

I was chosen from a number of students to work on a unique project, combining both Dr Ferguson’s and my very own research ideas. This project was based on the fact that brain-imaging research has revealed contradictory findings regarding empathy and emotion regulation in violent offenders. Research has demonstrated that having an impaired Theory of Mind is not predictive of aggressive behaviour and psychopathy. However, this study relied solely on participants’ response accuracy, which may not provide a sensitive enough measure for underlying differences.

My project used highly-sensitive eye-tracking methods to examine whether violence-prone people show deficits in their ability to judge emotions in others, as well as assessing whether the effects of violence-proneness can be extended to more general ToM abilities and explore whether emotional intelligence mediates performance on these ToM tasks. Participants were categorised in relation to their scores regarding their proneness to violence and were then contacted to participate in the main experiment if eligible. The main experiment comprised of filling out a short questionnaire which assessed their emotional intelligence, followed by two eye-tracked tasks.

The first task determined participants’ ability to empathise with other peoples’ emotional states, measured using the ‘Mind in the eyes’ task. In this task, participants were presented with a pair of eyes, displayed in the centre of the screen, and four possible emotional states to describe them (e.g. decisive, amused, aghast, bored). Participants were asked to identify, using a mouse cursor, the word which best describes what the person in the picture is thinking or feeling.

The second task examined participants’ general ToM ability—out with emotional empathy, using an eye-tracked false belief task. In this task, participants were required to listen to a series of short stories, in which Character A first moves a target object (e.g. a watch) to a specific location, followed by a second clip, in which Character B moves the object to a new location. It was made clear that the second action is either ‘explicitly observed’ or ‘missed’ by Character A, therefore setting up either true belief or false belief conditions. A final clip described Character A searching for the object. Participants’ eye movements in regards to the two possible locations were tracked, time-locked to the auditory input, thus allowing the examination of how listeners infer others’ knowledge to predict actions over time.

I played a vital role in the development of the experiment, coming up with my own research ideas, as well as designing the experiments, recruiting and testing participants, analysing the data and writing the end-of-project report. One of my career aspirations has always been to become a researcher, thus, being awarded this research bursary was extremely beneficial in terms on allowing me to obtain hands-on-experience (eye-tracking), including becoming familiar with running an experiment, which will also been extremely useful in the short term, particularly for my third year project. Moreover, obtaining this research grant has also broadened my understanding of recruitment methods, as well as helping improve and expand my knowledge of statistical analyses.

Furthermore, this opportunity has allowed me to work beside an experienced supervisor and thus become more aware of what becoming a researcher in Psychology is really like.

I strongly recommend the Nuffield Research Experience to second year students, and I would like to thank Heather for being so supportive and pleasant to work with.

I currently work as a Research Worker in the department of Psychosis Studies at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London. In a nutshell, I support and run experiments which will teach us how to support and treat people with Schizophrenia better, making a difference to their lives. I did the Applied Psychology course at Kent, and spent my placement year working in a Mother & Baby Psychiatric Unit where women who had become unwell during pregnancy or during their child’s first year could come for treatment. It had been arranged by a previous applied student, and gave me almost all the skills required for my current role, both in terms of research skills and experience working in a clinical setting with acutely ill patients. In fact, without this placement I would certainly not be in this position now, especially with not having done a masters. As well as setting me up for this role, I made vital contacts (and good friends!) in the field; they supported me with job applications, interviews and in setting up interesting and valuable work experience until I was able to find paid employment. The course at Kent also allowed me to conduct my dissertation in schools, as I love working with children, which also opened the door to paid temp work for the Uni later for their Child Development Unit. The Kent School of Psychology prepared me well for what is the first step in hopefully a long career in mental health research.

I would like to thank Heather for being so supportive and pleasant to work with.

Here’s what Julie Van de Vyver had to say about her time at Kent:

I studied Psychology at the University of Kent from 2007-2010.

I have learnt a great deal at the University of Kent both socially and academically and I already want to go back!
WATN? (Cont’d)

The School of Psychology at Kent is unique for a number of reasons. Its level of expertise in Social Psychology is one that helped me develop my interests and knowledge in topics such as prejudice, conflict, social inequality and cohesion, altruism, social movements, group dynamics and social influence, amongst others. Furthermore, the School of Psychology offers an extremely learner-friendly environment, continuously encouraging its students to perform at their best. During my time here I was given the opportunity to gain Research experience in my second year through the Research Experience Program with Dr. Lindsey Cameron. In my third year my supervisor, Professor Dominic Abrams, trusted and challenged me with a difficult final year project, which was one of the most rewarding learning experiences of my undergraduate career.

My three years at Kent fully shaped my interests and opened up a wide range of opportunities for me after my graduation. Specifically, the academic knowledge in Social Psychology led me to further my knowledge in issues of international development, equality, prejudice, and social cohesion. I undertook a course in the Education for Peace and Human Rights at the University of Utrecht and I also worked for a Human Rights NGO in Cape Town for a period of three months after my graduation.

Furthermore, Kent encouraged my interest and enjoyment in academia and research, which led me to take up the opportunity to work as a Research Assistant in the School of Psychology at Kent for Professor Dominic Abrams, Dr. Sofia Stathi, and Dr. Lindsey Cameron.

In September 2011 I will begin a Masters in Social Development Practice at UCL in order to improve my knowledge of Development issues and challenges. Following this I would like to return to Kent to further develop my research interests through a PhD in the School of Psychology. I would like to explore International Development issues from a Psychology perspective, i.e. researching people’s altruistic behaviours in Developed countries and/or the role of social identity in conflicts, as examples.

I would highly recommend Psychology at the University of Kent. The school have researchers in all fields of Psychology offering its students the opportunity to specialise in a wide variety of topics. To demonstrate this, some examples of careers my fellow graduates have chosen are teaching Psychology at a-level, working as an Alcohol and Drug Addiction Advisor, and volunteering at a nursing home.

In sum, you will have plenty of opportunities here!

Congratulations

Congratulations to the following members of staff who were awarded Faculty Small Grants:

Kirsten Abbot-Smith - £1,000 for a project entitled: “Relative action salience: when three-year-olds can and can’t learn words for actions”.

Markus Bindemann - £994.40 for a project entitled: “Recognizing different photo-ID cards of the same person”.

Steve Loughnan - £855.96 for a project entitled: “Inequality, Hostility, and Aggression”.

Erika Nurmsoo - £1,000 for a project entitled: “Asking questions and taking turns: Children’s strategic use of informants”.

The School of Psychology is pleased to announce the promotion of six members of staff. Karen Douglas, Mike Forrester and Robbie Sutton have now been awarded the title of Reader and Georgina Randseley de Moura, David Wilkinson and Jane Wood have been awarded Senior Lecturer status.

Congratulations to Mario Weick who has been awarded £500 by Lloyd’s of London for “Proposal Outline of Emerging Risks and Research”. Timothy Hopfthrow and Dominic Abrams also made noteworthy contributions to this project.

Congratulations to David Wilkinson who has been awarded £10,500 by the East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust for a project entitled “Does repeated vestibular stimulation induce lasting recovery from hemi-spatial neglect?”. The funding will actually come from the NHS Flexibility & Sustainability Fund (FSF) and are intended to provide additional infrastructure support for David’s MRC trial.

Congratulations to Mike Forrester who has been awarded a further £2,000 by the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada for his project entitled “Advanced Interdisciplinary Research in Singing (AIRS)”. Congratulations to Heather Ferguson who has been awarded £136,823 by Leverhulme Trust for a project entitled “Understanding the minds of others: a cognitive approach to theory of mind”.

Congratulations to David Wilkinson who has been awarded £7,827 from the AHRC for a project entitled “Imagining autism: drama, performance and intermediality as interventions for autistic spectrum conditions”. The total grant is actually £430,234 with David as co-investigator. This is an inter-departmental collaboration between the PI Dr Nicola Saughnessy (School of Arts), Dr Julie Beadle-Brown (Tizard) and David. The study will trial a novel therapy for autism across a number of local schools.

Congratulations to Emily Blake, Postgraduate Researcher, for winning the NOTA Graduate Research Prize of £500 plus conference fees.

Congratulations to Heather Ferguson who has been awarded £136,823 by Leverhulme Trust for a project entitled “Understanding the minds of others: a cognitive approach to theory of mind”.

Recent Publications


Psychology Society - Get Involved!

The newly elected Psychology Society committee has been hard at work over the summer delivering on their promise of improving the society by expanding opportunities for learning and experience. The committee is keen to create and promote new opportunities for our members to gain experience in psychology and increase their understanding of the vast discipline. Talks by professional psychologists, trips to the BPS conferences and awesome socials help make up the societies calendar. A brand new website has been created (www.ukpsychsoc.co.uk) so check it out for up to date information.

The first meeting and social of the society will be held on the first Thursday of term, but please check the website for more information. Membership to the society is only £3; see the website for more details.

Best wishes,

James Findon
The School of Psychology Football Team (pictured above) continued their unbeaten run since the inaugural game 3 years ago, winning 7-3. The victory was marked by a brace of wonderful goals from soon-to-depart Dr. Nic Hooper. Over and above his academic contribution to the School, Nic’s footballing talents have mesmerised all, and we wish him well in his move to Cyprus.

Back row left to right: Lazaros Gonidis, Dennis Nigbur (School alumnus), David Wilkinson, Rupert Brown (School alumnus), Nic Hooper, Caoilte O Ciardha, Stephen Loughnan

Middle row left to right: Andrew Russ, Hans Jongeneel

Front row left to right: Markus Bindemann, Dinkar Sharma, Ana Filipa Sousa Pires, Makis Batistatos

Joy Davut worked with Professor Richard Crisp on ‘Multicultural Experience and Preference for Prototypical Leaders:

“I found that having the opportunity to be able to assist an experienced Professor with current research gave me great insight to what I would have to do for my final year. As well as gaining valued experience helping to construct, organise and conduct experiments, I was able to contribute my own ideas and work directly with the Professor (Richard Crisp). I would highly recommend the research experience scheme to any student who wants to be more prepared for their final year projects and also if they want to be a part of new and exciting research.”

As part of the new Work Experience Scheme Dan Wright volunteered with a charity (People United) to get a first-hand insight into the local community and enterprise world:

“Previously, I hadn’t really considered the area of research that I’m now involved in through the work experience (based around design psychology), but I think that it’s an area of psychology that I’m really interested in pursuing. I believe work experience being offered is an effective way of helping to get an insight into certain aspects of work where a psychological background can be of benefit.

I think it helps to develop a sense of autonomy and independence regarding research. Also, it helps to build teamwork skills, currently, on the project I’m working on, we have divided the project amongst us and are working towards a common goal. I also feel it can be helpful for future contacts. With experience working in the field and working with an established business, people that are met and also the company providing the opportunity for work experience can prove to be good contacts to have in the future.”

Caption Competition

Our Forensic Psychology team were recently photographed in the laundry room in Keynes College. If you have an amusing caption that you would like to share on our Facebook and Twitter profiles please forward it to me at C.Turnham@kent.ac.uk.

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

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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