



Psychology

Newsletter



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

As every year, the end of the first term is a perfect time to reflect on the past year and, of course, to make plans for the new year. Over the past weeks, the newsletter team has been busy discussing its progress over the past year and we have many ideas that we would like to implement in the new year. We are also grateful for all the positive feedback (and constructive criticism!) we have been given over the past year. We promise to continue to work hard in the next year to keep you up to date with what's happening in and around the Department. But: we need your input. Read on page 3 how you can help us make the newsletter better. We look forward to receiving your feedback!

All of us would like to wish you a happy holiday season! Have a great break and happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year!

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Lecturers' Hobbies

by Chelsea Harmsworth

We wanted to know what lecturers do outside work and what hobbies they have. Today, find out what three of your lecturers do in their past-time:

Dr Mitch Callan

I do a lot of sport. I have a black belt in judo. I enjoy the department's weekly staff football match. I also enjoy cycling and going to the cinema.



I love going on city breaks. Since coming to the UK, I've been to Paris, London (obviously), Dublin, Stockholm, Istanbul, Rome, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Jerusalem. To a European this might sound fairly mundane, but growing up on the Canadian prairies I didn't have the opportunity I have now to spend a weekend wandering around various cities.

I'm also a big fan of one of the great institutions of British society: the public house. More specifically, there's little better than tucking into a Sunday roast in a cozy country pub on a lazy Sunday afternoon (with a pint of real ale too, of course).



Dr Tracy Robinson

Most important of all I love spending time with my family and this includes the dogs, we have 4 Labradors and mine is called Scooby (yes after the cartoon!). I adore animals and would love to have a rescue

centre one day with as many animals as I could fit in it.

I am an adrenaline junkie. I love motorbike riding (I have a 1000cc fireblade for trackdays and another blade for road use) I also have a RVF400, motorcross bike and a mini moto. I used to take part in amateur bike racing. I have a track car (called a radical) and my regular car for commuting etc is a Subaru Impreza. I used to work as a motorbike instructor whilst doing my PhD.

My other hobbies are snowboarding, mountain bike riding and clay pigeon shooting, I like the great outdoors and best environments are mountains, forests and lakes for me. I also do kickboxing and dancing.

Indoor hobbies are watching movies (I have a 7 foot screen with projector and surround sound) and I like Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Star Wars and all things Disney best. I also love gaming so have all sorts of games consoles. I very much enjoy reading which is often science fiction and fantasy. Anything with unicorns will do. Currently though I am reading the Audrey Hepburn biography as I admired her for her kind and respectful manner.

Dr Tom Foulsham

I love to travel and play the guitar. I also likes books, films and pub quizzes.



60 seconds with... Dr. Nick Cooper



What is your favourite book or film?

These days I only really get to see kids' movies, so I would have to go for "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs"

If you won the lottery what would be the first thing you would buy?

Masses of fancy fishing equipment!

If you were deserted on an island what would you take with you?

My new fishing equipment.

If you had a chance to go back in time for 24 hours where and when would you go?

Any beach, any time: then I could have a guilt-free 24 hours of fishing. I fear I might have a one-track mind!

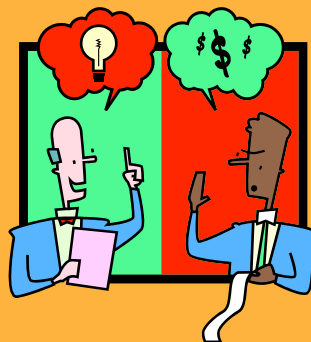
If you could be a celebrity for the day who would you be?

Joey Ramone, circa 1976, when The Ramones were at the height of their powers!

Readers' Corner

Last month, the PNG launched their own facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/PNG-Psychology-Newsletter-Group-University-of-Essex/102605043237115?ref=stream>). The page is intended to help the team get a feel for what their audience wants to read about. In particular, the group will be running surveys and polls on their site when researching for articles that they are preparing. Please help us make the newsletter better by replying to the questions we raise on our site.

In addition, we would like to stress that your views are extremely important to us. We thus encourage all readers of the newsletter to like the PNG facebook page and to share ideas, experiences, and views on studying present, and future students please share your views and would like to see addressed. The PNG facebook page is an ideal forum for communicating suggestions, ideas, and opinions about anything related to the Psychology Department.



The Research Experience Scheme



The Research Experience Scheme (RES) is now into its second successful year. Since the RES began last year over 50 students and 15 supervisors have taken part, with some students being able to continue on with their initial research. This term there are 15 students currently enrolled in RES and application closes shortly (end of first week of term) for those who want to take part in the RES next term.

The RES is aimed at first and second year undergraduate students who have an interest in gaining research experience. The RES allows students to volunteer to work together with staff members on ongoing research. No prior research skills are necessary as students will receive training on how to conduct research in different fields. Tasks that students will help researchers with may include data collection, entry, organisation and analysis, along with literature search, material construction and experimental design.

The RES was initiated so that students could get a feel for what it is like to work in research; the RES organiser, Dr Silke Paulmann, tells the PNG that she first got into research through an unpaid internship at a research institute during her second year of University – “In fact, I did several internships at various places (e.g. PR and marketing for city council, outreach activities for police, teaching, etc.) during my time at Uni to find out what I would like to do in the future. I felt

that all of my internships helped me in some way (even if just to find out where I didn't want to work)”. During Dr Paulmann's first year of working at Essex, she realised that few students were involved in all the exciting research happening in our department until their third year project; “I felt that this was too late and that it would be nice to help some of our students get some research experience early on in their degree”. Dr Paulmann adds that from a staff's perspective, it's also great to get to know students better from an early point in their degree “and all participating staff appreciate the help we get with some of our projects”.

The PNG also spoke to a current psychology student, Hannah Coney, (who is taking part in the RES this term) and her supervisor on the RES, Professor Rick Hanley. Hannah is involved in preparing materials for an experiment. She has analysed how a past piece of research could be improved. After identifying issues, Hannah is re-writing questions for a questionnaire and writing some definitions of words. Participants in the experiment will attempt to retrieve the appropriate word from these definitions. Hopefully the definitions will make participants experience tip-of-the tongue states when they try to work out what the word should be. From here Hannah will be taught how to input the data.

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Hannah will gain some insight into the type of experiments that Professor Hanley runs and understand how much hard work is required to run a well-designed experiment. Hannah will also get some experience in how to score experimental data and how to store data on an excel spreadsheet. These experiences should help her greatly when it comes to running her PS300 project, in her final year.

Last year, one of Professor Hanley's RES students, Ana Gheorghiu, was awarded a £2000 Undergraduate bursary by the Experimental Psychology Society to pay her expenses to continue her research for 10 weeks of the summer vacation. This in turn will help this student in her ultimate aim of getting a funded place to study for a PhD.

Hannah has most enjoyed working one-to-one with a supervisor, giving her a taste of what it is like to conduct research 'in the real world'. Hannah agrees that the RES gives valuable experience, both for her future studies and employment. Hannah adds, "There are no deadlines

and therefore you have to do it all off your own back, showing that you have a passion for the subject". She is enjoying working in an area that she finds interesting, and understanding what it feels like to be a participant and a researcher.

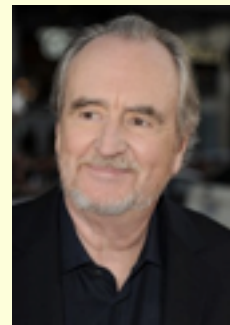
Professor Hanley adds, "RES is very useful for me as a means of helping me with my research programme. I have had three students so far and they have all been brilliant. I think it is an excellent scheme". When asked what she enjoys least about the scheme, Hannah said, "Nothing. All has been great so far. Although, I wish I had more 'spare' time to work on the research!"

If you would like to apply for the RES your application needs to be emailed to Dr Paulmann within the first week of the spring term. Details of the application process can be found on page 109 of the undergraduate students' handbook or on the webpage (<http://www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/department/RES/home.html>).

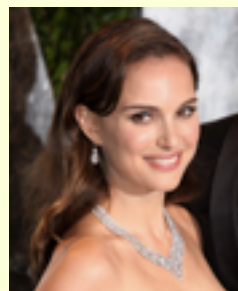
Just for fun...

... The PNG team wondered which celebrities were also psychology graduates, and found some surprising! Look out for more in each future edition.

1. Film director and writer, Wes Craven has a BA in psychology from Wheaton College.



2. Actress Natalie Portman got her Bachelors in psychology from Harvard University.



December's Weekly Seminars: A review from a second year student

by Hallam Rickett

The second month of the weekly psychology seminars has managed to maintain the high standard and fantastic subject diversity present in last months.

The month started with **Dr David Shank's** talk about explicit and implicit memory, and whether or not there are multiple memory systems. He began by explaining how explicit memory is declarative and drives recognition, while implicit is non-declarative, and can activate priming.

Using many fascinating examples, Shanks explained how the argument for multiple memory systems, based around the difference between recognition and priming on memory tasks may be wrong.

He argued that when using specific models using a general framework, single system memory theory is preferred. Furthermore, the single system memory appears to be a better fit for the dissociation found in these tasks in amnesia.

Shank's presentation was very informed and interactive, and succeeded in displaying serious evidence for single system memory.

Dean Wybrow's PhD seminar focused on surface dyslexia in the English language, questioning if phonological dyslexia was really as prevalent as we are often told.

Talking the room through his presentation, Wybrow explained how important it is to use adequate control participants when studying dyslexia. He illustrated a case in which the number of cases of surface dyslexia increased simply by using a different control group. Interestingly, in his exam-

ple, the choice of control group did not impact on the cases classified as phonological dyslexia.

Dr Fatima Felisberti gave a seminar about how facial memory operates in a social setting and whether social settings alter our memory. She argued that aspects of social exchanges can affect our memory, with some studies showing that we have better memory for people who are social helpers or whereas other studies show better memory for social cheaters.

Thus, there seems to be conflicting evidence. Felisberti's own work reports evidence that young and middle aged adults seem to be better at remembering co-operators, while the elderly actually appear better at remembering antisocial people. Furthermore, she discovered that the visual field can also affect memory, with stimuli presented to the left visual field producing superior memory.

Finally, **Dr Daniel Richardson** gave a thought provoking talk on eye movements and social cognition, which questioned how the existence of others impact where we look.

Richardson's experiments involved altering the levels of social context (presence of people, social setting, etc) presented to the participants.

It was found that there was a correlation between how much participant's followed the gaze of the speaker with how much of the conversation they comprehended. It was also suggested that participants who are provided with the same information in a conversation have improved gaze coordination.

People's gaze can also be seen to move to people who they believe to have been offended by the conversation. Interestingly, this only seems to happen when we believe that they can hear the conversation.

Again, I highly encourage anyone from any level of psychological study or interest to attend these fascinating talks to get a sense of the incredible range of subjects that psychology has to offer.

Research Interest

By Chelsea Harmsworth



This month, I interviewed Dr Silke Paulmann to find out more about her research interests. Dr Paulmann is particularly interested in (emotional) language processing. A lot of her work uses event related potential (ERPs) to investigate how the brain processes language successfully so rapidly. She is also interested in exploring what happens when our language system breaks down due to brain damage. I asked Dr Paulmann to tell me more about one of her recent articles (published in March 2012) called 'It's special the way you say it: An ERP investigation on the temporal dynamics of two types of prosody.'

Dr Paulmann said that what sparked her interest in investigating the time course of emotional and linguistic prosody was the fact that speakers use their tone of voice (or prosody) to express how they feel (e.g. happy, angry) but also use the same acoustic cues to express linguistically relevant functions. For instance, a high pitched voice is used to express happiness, but speakers also use a rising higher pitch at the end of a sentence to signal that they are asking a question. The question that Dr Paulmann asked in her study was how listeners distinguish between emotional and linguistic prosody use and whether one function of prosody could be considered more "important" during processing.

While there was some evidence in the literature that it takes only 200 to 300 ms to realise that someone is

speaking in an emotional tone of voice to us and that it takes almost double the time to process linguistic prosodic functions (e.g. "this is the end of a statement"), no-one had actually looked at the comparative nature of these two processes which is why Dr Paulmann started her investigation.

In her study, participants were presented with sentences that started out sounding like neutral statements but then ended either in an emotional tone of voice or as a question. Processing of these sentences was compared to processing sentences that did not contain any changes (e.g. statements, questions, emotional sentences). The ERP results suggest that switches from neutral to emotional prosody seem to be preferentially processed, that is quicker, than switches of linguistic prosody. The findings also revealed that the processing of these two prosodic functions relies partly on different neural mechanisms. This is particularly important for neural models of speech comprehension, as so far, they have failed to adequately explain which role prosody (linguistic or emotional) plays in dynamic speech comprehension.

We asked Dr Paulmann whether there was any leading work from this and she told us: 'While I haven't planned any further studies exploring *linguistic* prosody, the study definitely helped shape the way I think about my current research questions. In particular, I would like to further explore other prosodic functions in more detail. For instance, how do we convey and recognise attitudes (e.g. excitement, boredom, politeness, rudeness,...) and what factors (e.g. mood, age of listeners) can influence our perception of emotions and attitudes?'

Dr Paulmann's work is very interesting and can give us real insights into the fascinating subject of language and how humans process verbal and non-verbal cues from others. The majority of her work focuses on how we perceive emotions from speech in our first language. But, as a second language speaker of English, Dr Paulmann is also interested in investigating cross-cultural differences in emotional prosody use. She told us that she has recently been working on a piece of work with her colleague Dr Ayse Uskul. In their work, they investigated how Chinese and English listeners



recognised vocal emotions in their native or foreign language. Their results showed that although we are generally quite good at recognising emotions from speech in an unknown or second language, this process is more error prone. Dr Paulmann said she would like to understand why this is so. She explains: 'If we can find out what drives the recognition

differences we observed between native and non-native speakers, we can perhaps at some point help prevent miscommunication across cultures that stem from wrong prosody use.'

Don't forget!

PSYCHOLOGY

CHRISTMAS PARTY

- Wednesday Dec. 12th @ 8pm
- Level 2 Bar
- Free Entry

