



Psychology

Newsletter

Happy Holidays!



It is always amazing how quickly a busy term comes to an end. One minute you are deep down preparing for lectures or exams, next minute, Santa Claus is waiting for you. We hope you've all enjoyed the past autumn term and are now looking forward to a well deserved break !

Before we let you indulge in sweets and treats, take a moment to read our latest issue. Learn more about how foreign students feel about Essex, or why we spend the way we do when going Christmas shopping. If there is anything that you would like to read about, please let us know.

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

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Studying Away From Home

The University of Essex has a long tradition of teaching students from around the world. In fact, it is argued to be one of the most internationally diverse universities in the UK. Students from more than 130 different countries study at Essex and the language and cultural diversity is truly felt when walking across campus. The international flair doesn't stop in front of the Psychology entrance doors either. Each year, we welcome students from various countries including students from Brunei, Bulgaria, China, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Jamaica, Lithuania, Malaysia, Norway, USA, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Zimbabwe to just name a few. Studying at Essex is attractive to many of the foreign students because of the high quality of teaching and research that the Department offers. Moreover, as we all know, studying abroad helps to broaden students' horizons and increases their chances on the job market after graduation.

You might not know this, but one of the largest groups of foreign students studying in the Department comes from Norway (we currently have over 50 Norwegian students registered with us). Clearly, studying away from home can be exciting and challenging at the same time. We talked to some of the students from Norway about their experience and we were happy to hear how positively they judged their experience. For instance, when being asked what they liked about the Department, the majority of them highlighted our excellent organisational skills and the high quality of the teaching environment (e.g. our large data processing labs with state-of-the-art iMacs). The chance to make use of teaching rooms when they are not used for teaching was also crucial to some students. "We have computer labs with Macs that we can use when we need them (unless there's a class) and I like that it [the Department] is kind of separated from the rest of the University. It makes us feel exclusive", said one student. All of the students who participated in our small survey also praised the possibility to easily talk to and get in touch with lecturers. As one student put it: "I feel that the general

vibe is polite and helpful".

Moreover, our strengths in research-led teaching were also highlighted. For example, two 3rd year students said "It is amazing to have the opportunity to use equipment like EEG" and "The Department provides an opportunity to engage in research early on through the Research Experience Scheme, which has been of great importance to me". Finally, one student also found the positive in having to write lab reports and essays throughout the degree: "Because we have so many assignments and compulsory lectures/classes, we also learn more. We learn how to write academically, which my sister (who studies Law in Oslo) did not learn and [she] almost had a panic attack before her first exams".

Our students do not only like our department, they are also very fond of the campus: "Colchester campus is great. There are a lot of places to eat and drink, and there's the campus shop which comes in handy. There are a lot of societies and clubs. There is definitely going to be a society and/or club for everyone here". However, as much as they love their experience, they also acknowledged some challenges. Some are easily solved, like buying enough adapters to use technical equipment from Norway, or to look the right way when crossing the road. Others might initially be more of a challenge (e.g. "It can be a little bit difficult to understand the language because people tend to talk faster than what you're used to (and use slang a lot) but that's something you get used to."), but luckily, one student pointed out that there is really nothing to worry about when coming to Essex as "you get all the help you ask for".

Don't forget that you also have the possibility to study abroad! To find out more go to www.essex.ac.uk/studyabroad.





Big Bang at Essex!

On Monday December 16th, six-hundred (yes: 600!) school pupils attended the Big Bang event organised and hosted by the University's faculty for Science and Health. Loads of interesting activities and demonstrations such as coral reef and climate change research were showcased all day highlighting the faculty's excellence in science research. The Department of Psychology was represented by Dr Mary-Jane Budd, Dr. Nick Cooper, and Dr. Silke Paulmann who demonstrated how brain waves are measured by means of Electroencephalography. The demonstration was a huge success, in fact, it was so popular that the three researchers ran out of electrodes just before the end of the event!



Dr. Nick Cooper explains how an EEG works.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Research

Autism spectrum disorder is a condition associated with impairments in social interaction and communication, as well as restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests. A recently published study by Dr. Holmboe and colleagues investigated the longitudinal development of autistic traits in a large national twin sample. Investigating twins allowed the authors to estimate the genetic and environmental influences on autistic traits over time. They found that autistic traits were highly stable between 8 and 12 years of age. Furthermore, the stability in autistic traits could largely be accounted for by genetic factors, with the environment unique to each twin playing a minor role. The environment shared by twins had virtually no effect on the longitudinal stability in autistic traits.

Holmboe, K., et al. (2013). Strong genetic influences on the stability of autistic traits in childhood. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*

Winter Con-derland?

by Keishema Kerr



Is fancy tinsel and flashing lights manipulating us into spending more whilst we Christmas shop?

We are all familiar with retail techniques, which are aimed at increasing sales such as the use of colour. For example, Red stimulates our appetite and explains why many fast food chain logos are predominantly red and can energize—even our spending. Leading consumer Psychologist Nancy Puccinelli has found gender differences in how we process information within the retail domain. She found that women process information like colour of pricing with more depth, as many women become suspicious of red in adverts whereas in a study conducted men believed the stimulus printed in red was offering more of a saving than those printed in black.

But then the issue comes down to what you buy someone when you have no idea. I'm pretty sure we've all received the generic but appreciated bath sets more than once. Research in psychology suggests that experiences make us happier than possessions. That is because when you get used to seeing something that you own every day, your initial excitement fades away. However, the memories of experiences can last for years. Another difference between men and women are the different psychological defence mechanisms for dealing with poor gifts: women pretend the gift is just what they've always wanted whereas men are more likely to say what they think. Yikes!

Triangular balance is a technique involving putting the biggest, usually most expensive product in the centre of a shelf and organising everything else around it. The customer's eye is drawn to this key item and it reduces the chances of buying cheaper alternatives as customers come to

the conclusion that IS better

value for money. High traffic positions like where queues are or by changing rooms at Christmas time often have present bows or inexpensive gift sets just waiting to be grabbed by consumers. Another technique is illusion of exclusivity, which is when the same bag in different colours is displayed in one place. You don't want everyone having the same present you're buying your stylish aunt.

Often a cognitive dissonance can occur whilst shopping between "Can I afford this?" and "This will make someone happy if I bought it." Creating a feeling of tension amongst the fun celebrations during the countdown to Christmas. However, Santa baby being on repeat in department stores aren't just for irritating retail assistants with long Christmas hours but is used to create nostalgia in the customers. Research has shown that nostalgia increases mood and this mood is more likely to result in boosting gift budgets. This feeling of nostalgia can also be created via other senses like smell. The traditional Christmas pine scent can increase physiological arousal and cause people to shop for longer.

Now I've exposed some of the tricks of the trade, feel well equipped for your Christmas shopping whether you're well organised or more of a Christmas Eve rush kind of shopper. Happy Shopping and Merry Christmas! x

