

# Department of Psychology



## Charity Cake Sale for Histiocytosis Research Trust raises £486!

On February 27th, Research fellow Dr Karla Holmboe and her partner Jo organised a charity cake sale in memory of their daughter Tilly who died last year of Langerhans Cell Histiocytosis disease. The cake sale took place in the Centre for Brain Science and staff and MSc students indulged in a variety of sugary treats which included everything from banana bread to rich chocolate cake. The event raised £486 for the Histiocytosis Research Trust ([www.hrtrust.org](http://www.hrtrust.org)) which promotes and



funds scientific research on the causes underlying histiocytosis diseases. Karla and Jo have almost reached their target of £5000 - if you would like to help them reach their goal, please donate at [www.everyclick.com/tilly](http://www.everyclick.com/tilly).

## Happy March!

Spring is literally around the corner and we are all looking forward to some nicer and warmer weather. Once the sun comes out, the campus becomes even busier and more vibrant than it usually is. You can see students and staff sitting and chatting outside while enjoying their well deserved break in the sun.

It's these moments that we are looking for in our picture contest! We are looking for pictures displaying life in the department and on campus. Simply take a picture with your phone or camera next time you are enjoying a great "Department of Psychology moment". For instance, perhaps you are fascinated with an experimental setup - if so, get your camera out and share the scene with others. Or, what about taking a snapshot next time you and your friends are hanging out on square 1 before one of your lab classes? You could also send us a picture of your study group meeting in the library. Send us as many happy moments as possible and maximize your chance to win a book voucher in our prize draw. Pictures may be published on our website, facebook page, or in the next editions of our newsletter. All submitted entries have an equal chance of winning the prize draw. Simply send your best moments to Dr. Silke Paulmann. We are looking forward to seeing your snapshots!

## Final year projects

by Shannon Jackman

Third year students across the University are currently embarking on their dissertation projects, and the Department of Psychology is no different. Within the department, students are conducting truly fascinating research across a variety of psychological fields. They are using advanced equipment such as: electroencephalograms, eye trackers and electrooculography to help combine the knowledge they have learnt throughout their degree to create an original piece of research.

I had a chat with some third year students to find out how they are getting on with their projects, and what kind of things they were investigating. Natasha Chilvers conducted a developmental project looking at the effects of font size and type on primary school children's reading speed. She found that while size does affect how fast children can read words, font had no effect. This is one of the many different projects currently available in the department.

I myself am conducting an EEG (electroencephalogram) study comparing mirror neuron activity during 2 different types of judgements in expert street dancers and novices. I am not alone, this academic year sees an influx of third year students tackling EEG experiments.

Jess Smith is currently collecting data for her study which is looking at sensation seeking and impulsiveness, and whether high levels of these predicts risk taking behaviour. To measure risk taking behaviour she has created a computer based task in which participants have to blow up a balloon, and for every pump of the balloon the participant receives money. If the balloon bursts, then the participant loses the money. What she expects to find is that when the amount of money at risk is low (5p per pump) then people will engage in more risk taking, than when the amount of money is high (25p per pump) then people will be less impulsive. Some students have found that their hypotheses have not been supported. This hasn't deterred Laura Cope, as she sees it as a way of stretching her understanding of her project and sees it as a challenge to understand why her predictions weren't found.

Third year PS300 projects here in the Department are truly fascinating this year, with students going all out to create interesting research. To see for yourselves the wonderful work people have created, please attend the students poster presentation on the 21st of March, as this will be a great opportunity to learn something new about the mind.



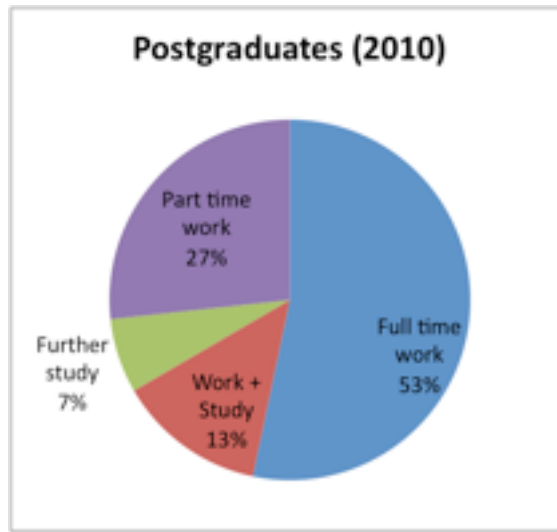
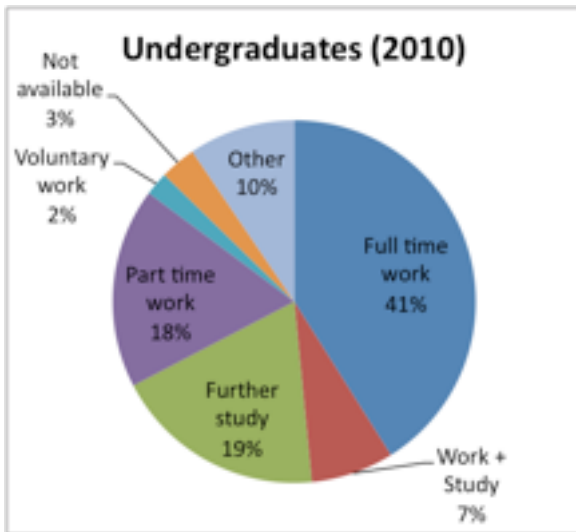
### Poster Day

Don't forget to attend the Departmental Poster Day on 21st of March. Starting at 1:00 pm, our current third year students will present their research in three different sessions each lasting for approx. one hour. The posters will be presented in Room 5.300 A - you can get there by taking the entrance close to Cafe Zest just off square 2 (5th floor). There will also be coffee, tea, and cake - so come and support our final year students and get some inspiration for your own research!

## Where are our graduates 6 months after graduation?

The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey tracks the destinations of home and EU graduates 6 months after they leave university. The data for graduates who completed their degrees in 2010 are now available: the pie charts below show where people have ended up. Forty eight percent of undergraduates and 93% of postgraduates are in graduate level work or study.

It's great to see our former students being successful. Remember that it is vital that you start to think about your career while you are studying – don't leave it until after graduation! The careers centre offer a wide range of services to help you: [www.essex.ac.uk/careers](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers).



## Psychology students present their final year projects at BPS Undergraduate Conference



We are proud to report that two of our final year students, Espen Sjoberg (pictured far left) and An Le, recently presented data at the BPS Undergraduate Conference in Glasgow. The data was collected as part of their PS300 project and the two will share their BPS conference experience with us in the next newsletter. Well done you two!

Watch us on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5ly7hJUrtQ>





# 60 seconds with...

Prof. Geoff Ward

*What's your conference coffee-break pitch for: "What do you work on?"*

I am interested in human memory, how it works, and what are our memory limitations. People study memory with lots of different tasks and different stimuli, and it's tempting for researchers to specialise and become experts in one area. The danger is that theories that apply to one area don't fit so well when applied to other areas and one of my current interests is to investigate the similarities and differences between different tasks and stimuli. The grand hope is to have a unified theory of memory that integrates all the different tasks and materials.



*Do you ever do the cooking at home and do you have a specialty?*

Yes I regularly cook, mostly at weekends. I like cooking roast dinners.

*What is the one question about your research that you wish you were asked?*

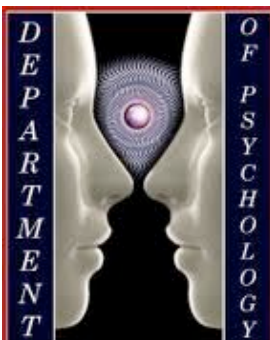
I'm always flattered when people ask me about my work – it's really nice to think that people are interested. I wish I was asked more often whether I would mind sharing data sets with other researchers - it's great to see the alternative interpretations that can be drawn from a set of data.

*What celebrity would you invite for your birthday party?*

I'm a big fan of Radio 4's Test Match special (TMS) cricket commentary, and so I'd be tempted to invite the TMS presenter Jonathan Agnew. However, if I did, I would worry that nobody else would turn up (!) so I might be more tempted to go for a comedian like David Mitchell, Hugh Laurie, or Lee Mack.

*What advice would you give to anyone who wants to become a researcher?*

Being an academic researcher is fantastic as you get to try to understand things that truly interest you. Two specific pieces of advice: a) Choose a topic that you are genuinely interested in and b) make sure that you know WHY you are doing your research. I call this latter point the "My Granny question" - it is often far easier to say what research you are doing and even what you are hoping to find, but (as Granny has a tendency to ask) it can be far harder to answer the question "why are you doing that?" Being able to provide a rationale for the research is really important – and it is what frames the research in the introduction of any write up.



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## Choices, choices, choices...?

By Lisa Phillips

If you are a second year undergraduate psychology student you will soon have to choose your third year modules from a variety of options. In the current and next version of the newsletter, we will introduce some of the modules. Hopefully, this short guide will help with making your decision...

PS484 Reading Development and Dyslexia taught by Prof. Rick Hanley: "The most distinctive aspect of this module is that it is mostly taught in the form of podcasts, each lasting approximately an hour. Students download and watch the podcast, and then attend a 50 minute discussion group in which the material covered in the podcast is discussed. The course should be seriously considered by anyone who intends to pursue a career in teaching/educational psychology. This is because it covers the cognitive skills that children need in order to become successful readers, and the reasons why some children experience difficulties in learning to read. It also looks at scientific investigations of the way in which reading should be taught in schools."

We talked to some of the students currently taking this module and they felt that the discussion groups not only give them an opportunity to review more complicated material but encourage covering the material in-depth. Students also said that they find it very interesting that questions are given after each podcast to discuss at the seminars. The seminars help students to focus on key aspects of their lectures and a number of students felt that they are putting more effort than usual into the module due to its podcast/seminar structure. One student did comment that not everyone contributes equally but nevertheless they really enjoy the module.

PS475 Judgement and Decision Making (JDM):

Dr. Tim Rakow summarises: "Should I think hard about a decision, or go with my gut reaction? Should I make the first move in a sales negotiation, or let the other person name their price first? How well can I predict the length of time it will take to write my essay? How do juries reach a verdict? The topics covered in JDM address these questions and many more. The module consists of lectures given jointly by Will Matthews and Tim Rakow, and workshops with a mixture of activities, including discussions and demonstrations of key findings from research."

Present JDM students said that the module ties in well with other modules. This is useful as it reinforces learning and because all the module's materials are very interesting and can be easily applied to daily life, it aids understanding of materials. The workshops use practical examples of what was taught in lectures, making the content more memorable. Students also find having two lecturers present simultaneously beneficial as each lecturer can view the other from a student's perspective, and can also ask a question when they think something needs clarifying. JDM uses lots of studies and examples and would suit the logically-minded student, who has good reasoning skills and preferably an ability to easily understand graphical information.

PS482 Cognitive Development:

Prof. Debi Roberson explains: "For those interested in child development, PS482 looks at some specific issues in cognitive development. The first five lectures are concerned with infants and pre-linguistic children, considering the evidence for innate modules for domains such as number, language and object properties. The second half of the course considers specific issues in language learners, such as metacognition, children's understanding of the difference between living and non-living things, and the development of abstract concepts. These issues are mainly considered in the context of typical development, but the lecture in week 9 considers the patterns of impairment found in atypical cognitive development. Next year the format of the lectures will change to the podcast and discussion session model, if it proves to be a popular format."

We hope that this has provided you with a prelude of what you can look forward to next year. Of course, there are many other modules to choose from that have not been included here. Further options will be included in the next edition of the newsletter.

## Careers in Psychology

Read about Essex psychology graduate Rosalind-Jane Irwin who graduated with a 2:1. Rosalind-Jane is currently working in Singapore as an analyst at Accenture, a global consulting firm.

### *What does your work/training involve?*

I am in a change management role. Accenture focuses on I.T consulting, implementing new I.T and technology systems to improve the efficiency of (usually large) companies. My role is to help companies adjust to the changes and make the process as streamline as possible. I identify who will be most affected by the changes and produce training plans to assist them. I also help prepare case study materials to be used in interviews. This encouraged me to bring out my creative side and gain a deep insight into how interviews work.



### *How did you find out about your course?*

My best friend went for an interview with Accenture, at her interview they asked if she would be able to recommend anyone to the company that would be interested in working in the Singapore office. She said me! As I am from a psychology background I didn't know if I would be a strong enough candidate, however in actual fact being a psychology graduate played to my advantage as my interviewers (I had a set of four interviews) felt that I could bring a different perspective to the company.

### *What is the most enjoyable aspect of what you currently do?*

The most enjoyable aspect of what I do is interacting with such a diverse range of people every day. The key to doing well in management consulting is to network. You learn a lot, not only about other people but also about yourself and where your strengths and weakness lie.

### *What is the most challenging aspect of what you currently do?*

Accenture is made up of incredibly intelligent people. You have to learn very quickly and put in long hours if necessary. However, the challenging environment encourages you to push yourself and achieve things you never thought you would be able to master

### *Which of the skills that you got from your degree do you use most in your current work/study?*

Put simply my degree in psychology taught me a lot about people and why they do what they do. As my role is very people orientated, having a background in psychology helps me to communicate well with a range of diverse personalities and keep an open mind.

### *What advice would you give to students interested in pursuing this kind of work/study?*

Joining a big company with a good name is definitely a good path to follow straight out of university. It looks great on your CV and exposes you to lots of different roles and people. If you feel like a role doesn't fit you, it is quite easy to try something else out within the company. Management consulting is not a 9-5 job; the hours tend to be long, especially on a busy project. However, it is very rewarding when you see your hard work pay off. You also tend to work very closely with your team which creates strong relationships and gives you sense of team morale. Most of all, never be afraid to try things out and take the opportunities that come your way - sometimes they work for you, sometimes they don't but in the process you learn so much about the world, yourself and other people. In my opinion, that type of knowledge is irreplaceable.