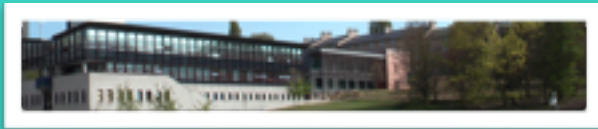


# Department of Psychology

## Welcome!



A very warm welcome to all new Psychology students. We hope that you will enjoy your experience in the Department and at the University of Essex! Also, a warm welcome back to all returning Psychology students. We hope that you had an enjoyable summer break.

With the start of this new academic year, the campus is once more filled with energy and vitality. We are confident that our students will profit from this vibrant and multicultural environment, both in their personal and academic life. The Essex community is friendly and welcoming and all amenities (e.g. library, gym, supermarket) are within easy reach. Psychology students will find that the purpose-built building that the Department is housed in contains the latest facilities for small and larger group teaching, laboratory-based learning, and research. So: the opportunities are there - now go and make the most of it! We wish all our students a successful academic year.

The current edition of the newsletter contains once again lots of interesting information about things going on in the Department. Read about what has been happening over the summer, about staff's research interests, and about teaching related matters (e.g. view on podcast lectures). And don't forget, you can help shape this newsletter by sending us your news, pictures, or ideas for the newsletter (simply send your comments/materials to Dr Silke Paulmann). We hope you enjoy this edition.

Have a great start of term, everyone!

## What a recent student thinks about our MSc Psychology Degree

While new students are about to embark on their MSc journey, leaving student Nina Wolinski has kindly agreed to give us an impression about the course offered by the Department.

**Nina, what is your background?** My undergraduate degree is in philosophy. I then taught English in South Korea for a few years before coming back to England to study for this course.

**What did you enjoy most about the MSc course?** I found the lectures really interesting and enjoyed learning how to use the equipment in the CBS for things such as eye-tracking, EEG and TMS.

**What did you enjoy least?** As it is a BPS accredited conversion course, certain areas need to be included. This meant that, inevitably, some topics covered weren't particularly relevant to what I want to do next. However, it was a good opportunity to learn about areas of psychology that I wouldn't have otherwise studied at this level.

**While UG students were on a break over the summer, you worked on your MSc thesis. What was that like?** Fun and hectic! It was great to be able to dedicate my time to just one piece of work and to therefore study it in depth. I'd like to study for a PhD next and so it was good to know that I was learning skills that were transferable to future research.

**What is your advice to students starting this year?** Make the most of the departmental seminars; they're a good opportunity to hear about current research that's being conducted.

**What are your plans for the future?** I'm planning to study for a PhD in cognitive neuroscience and would then like a career in research.

# Psychology Department participates in Kids' Uni Event

At the beginning of summer, the so-called Kids' Uni Event was held at FirstSite in Colchester. Over 300 small and tall visitors attended the all day event and listened to lectures on various topics and participated in activities organised by different departments of the University. In the morning, Psychology lecturer Dr Silke Paulmann held a lecture on how we communicate emotions through our tone of voice. In her interactive lecture, children between the ages of 6 and 10 years old as well as their parents tried their best to proof recent scientific findings wrong. While research suggests that it is more difficult to judge the emotional tone of voice from speakers who do not speak your native language, participating kids were great at rec-

ognising the emotional tone of speech materials not only when spoken in English pseudo-language, but also when spoken in Turkish, German, or Chinese pseudo-language. Everyone had a

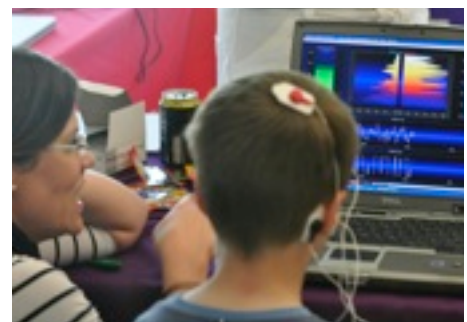
PhD students Lydia Whitaker and Jen Lewis showed everyone how an eye-tracking experiment works. Kids and parents were excited and happy about the opportunity to learn more about the De-



fabulous time and kids even got a certificate for participating in the event!

The Department also organised hands-on activities. Dr Mary-Jane Budd and Dr Paulmann showed children how an EEG recording works, while Dr Tom Foulsham, and

partment's research and their feedback was extremely positive. There will be similar outreach events called *University Fun Days* for children aged ten to twelve in the Tendering area of Essex in October and December. If you require more information about these upcoming events please get in touch with Education Outreach Officer Annika Young.



# JDM summer school a huge success!

by Claire Heard & Roshni Parikh

From August 28<sup>th</sup> to September 4<sup>th</sup> 2012, the Department of Psychology at the University of Essex was proud to host the inaugural Summer School for the European Association for Decision Making (EADM). The conference was attended by Masters and PhD students and was led by the School's four prestigious faculty members who facilitated a series of talks, practical exercises and discussions; covering the theory, applications and methods of Judgment and Decision Making (JDM) research. Our role as Summer School Assistants entailed providing information packs for the attendees, organising refreshments and experiencing a flavour of the extensive area of study that JDM is.

One of the most memorable talks we attended was delivered by Dr. Mitch Callan, on justice motive effects in temporal discounting. We learnt that when one's belief in a just world is supported or challenged, the delay period for a larger reward changes. We also learnt that one's level of personal relative deprivation also affects the delay discounting process.

The conference consisted of several guest speakers, one of whom was Dr. Mandeep Dhimi from the University of Surrey. Her series of lectures and workshops on the legal and criminal aspects of decision making looked at different levels of the judicial system, from the crime scene itself to fingerprint evidence and a judge's decision making process.



One of the sessions that we enjoyed most involved learning about fingerprint analysis and the ambiguities faced by forensic scientists when trying to match potential suspects to the crime scene evidence. Dr. Dhimi described the various challenges in this process, for example the pressure, rotation and superimposition of a print. We also participated in small group work where we were given the opportunity to use and understand the functions of the microscope apparatus utilised by the analysts.

We also examined the guidelines used by judges when making legal decisions, for example, in the case of drugs, assault etc. Following this, we broke off into small groups to discuss the various limitations of them and proposed potential solutions to overcome them, in an effort to produce a clearer and more consistent decision making approach. Another great lecture came from Dr. Nick Sevdalis (Imperial College London), with his lecture titled: *Decision making in the real world: From Aviation to surgery and beyond*. In the talk he began by ex-

plaining how past research has been conducted to understand the decision making processes used by airline pilots and how this research has helped the development of tools for training pilots. Afterwards, he discussed how this application of decision making research to aviation can be translated into the hospital environment in terms of understanding the decision making processes of surgeons and their teams.

There were many more fascinating talks, such as Dr. Will Matthews' lecture on the language of comparative judgement as well as Dr. Andreas Glöckner's session on eye-tracking methodology. The week was concluded with a delicious evening meal in Wivenhoe, before the attendees parted ways. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Rakow and the Summer School members for this valuable and fun experience; assisting at events like this is definitely something we would recommend to students in the future.

## Podcasts versus Lectures?

by Lisa Phillips

By the end of their first year, students have all become accustomed to live lectures – the hustle and bustle of pushing their way through the hall doors, scanning the crowd for a familiar face or an empty seat, scribbling frantic notes whilst trying to comprehend what the lecturer is saying; love them or loathe them, lectures are certainly something new that all students adapt to. By their second year, students are adapting to a different style of lecture – the podcast. And by their final year the podcast may (depending on module choice) be a regular addition to a student's timetable.

There are differing opinions of podcasts amongst the student body – some love the convenience, others worry about losing the 'atmosphere' of the lecture hall. But what do the lecturers think of podcasts versus live lectures?

### Podcasts – the pros:

*Quality:* Podcasts free quality time to allow for more interactive sessions and personalised learning, such as small weekly discussion groups where students can ask questions, focus on set homework tasks and discuss further issues that interest them. Podcasts are often of higher quality than live lectures, as they can be re-recorded and improved, giving the lecturer the opportunity to edit something said in an unclear fashion (with some lecturers confessing to re-recording what they say many times to get it just right). Furthermore, with

increasing student numbers, and the subsequent difficulties such as lateness, noise during lectures, etc., podcasts solve the problems that students have when attempting to attend to a lecture fraught with distractions.

*Pace:* Students can control the rate at which information is presented, pausing and listening to the lecturer again when they need to digest the material, being able to take notes at their own pace and cross-reference with textbooks. Replaying parts that were extra complicated or unclear on the first listen-through should enhance learning.

*Convenience:* Podcasts are wonderfully convenient. Listening to the lecture in their own time, students can pause for a break whenever they wish so they won't face fatigue like they may in the lecture hall. Whatever the reason, we all sometimes miss lectures! But as a podcast attending to lectures is a more flexible learning experience - and mobile - students can view lectures wherever it suits them, anytime and anywhere, even via their iPhone, etc.

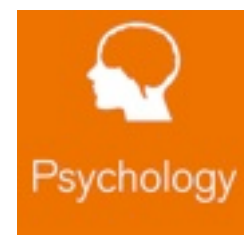
### Podcasts – the cons:

*Lack of interaction:* A disadvantage of podcasts is the lack of face-to-face interaction during the lecture between student and lecturer. Many lecturers like to "read" students' faces to see if their point is clear and if not can respond appropriately, making changes or additions to their material. Furthermore, students may miss the opportunity to interact with each other and ask questions immediately to seek clarity (or even to challenge points), which can sometimes lead to bet-

ter material being covered. With weekly seminars, however, this problem can be overcome and staff/students get to interact more closely than in a lecture setting. Therefore, lecturers strongly advise students to take advantage of seminars and any other interactive options that exist for each module, such as direct contact with the teaching staff either in person or via email, or via online forums such as Moodle, or in a scheduled question and answer session where students can meet with the lecturer to clarify aspects of the material that has been collected on a discussion board prior to the session, for example.

*Lack of structure:* The convenience and flexibility of viewing podcasts can also be a disadvantage if viewing is postponed for too long and students quickly start falling behind with the work. Timetabled live lectures are structured to encourage students to study at a particular time during the course. Students know they need to attend and pay attention. Without the structure of timetabled lectures some students lack the motivation to find the time to watch podcast lectures. Again, it is important to attend the regular timetabled seminars, discussion groups, etc. This structured time also helps to ensure that students pace their learning throughout the year, rather than cram right before the exams.

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**Tips for podcasts:**

Some lecturers felt that for motivated students this combination of podcasts and seminars can work well. Many felt concern for students, however, who are not sufficiently engaged in a class, and so may not make the time to consistently listen to the podcasts, in turn seeing no point attending the seminars. The most important thing is the same for podcasts as it is in live lectures - how you respond to the material. Some lecturers passed on their top tips for successful podcast viewing:

Make a plan - much research (including that undertaken by our department) has shown

- that forming "implementation intentions" means that we are more likely to meet our deadlines (including watching podcasts). It helps to make an explicit plan about *when* you will

do it, *where* you will do it, and *how* you will do it.

- Study with others - add with *whom* to the "when, where and how";
- Plan with someone else to watch the podcast together and you are even more likely to stick to your goals.
- Replay podcasts - note any particular slides that you feel need your attention again and go back to them after further reading on the topic.
- Pay attention - avoid watching podcasts in a distracting environment.
- Avoid cramming all podcasts in before exams - podcasts can give students a false sense of security
- Remember - research shows that active techniques are much more effective than just passively re-watching podcasts. So "act on" the material.

- Make notes, draw diagrams etc., as you listen.
- Share your notes - discuss them with friends, practice applying what you know.
- Summarise - pause the podcast and write a brief summarising sentence to make sure you understand what you have heard.
- Try making your own podcast - why not record your own explanations/thoughts and share it with friends!

However you choose to learn from podcasts, be sure to get into a routine of keeping up-to-date with them, otherwise attending the seminars will mean nothing. Staying on top of study, and taking steps to ensure you do, can make all the difference, no matter whether driven by face-to-face lectures or podcasts and seminars.

*Thank you to all lecturers who gave their thoughts on this.*

## Interview with a Graduate

by Shannon Jackman

For graduates, the 19th of July 2012 marked the end of an era, and the start of a new chapter in their lives, as they celebrated the culmination of three years of hard work and fun. Graduation 2012 was a fantastic celebration of the achievements made by the class of 2012, but it was also a time of reflection. I had a chat with a recent graduate to find out what she will miss most about Uni life, and about what the future has in store. Laura Cope graduated with an upper 2.1, and she very kindly agreed to talk to me about her graduation experience.

**Laura, congratulations! You have done very well.** Thank you, I am very proud of my result.

**What will you miss the most/least about the department?** I will miss the amazing facilities like the labs and the technical support, and I will of course miss the lovely Jane Cadogan. She was always so supportive and kind. I definitely won't miss the deadlines and the hectic exam schedules.

**What are you most proud of?** Academically I am most proud of getting a first in my dissertation. All the data collection and hours spent in front of the laptop paid off. I am also very proud of my achievements with SX dance. I received a colours award for significant contribution to the dance society. I put a

lot of effort into the dance society, so I was very proud when it was acknowledged.

**So what are your plans for the future?** I am currently looking for internships for PR companies, but I would also like to work with children with special needs if the opportunity presents itself. That's the great thing about having a Psychology degree, as it allows you access to many different types of jobs.

**Finally, if you had to give one piece of advice to current students, what would it be?** I would say, just enjoy it all while you can. It can be hard to find the right balance between work and play, but your final year goes by so fast, you really need to have some happy memories.

## Seeing Text

Psychology Prof Arnold Wilkins' research explores vision and health. For instance, he is studying how visual and visuo-perceptual difficul-



ties contribute to reading disorders. Recently, he wrote an interesting article about "seeing text". As Prof Wilkins describes, "you cannot read unless you can see text, but seeing text is more complicated than it appears." In his article, he highlights important points that should be considered when designing texts. For instance, he suggests to use

non-serif fonts like Verdana or Tahoma instead of Times or Sassoon. Text should also be spaced sufficiently.

Read more about his research findings and more tips on how to improve your texts at:

[www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/departments/AW.html](http://www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/departments/AW.html)

What are the chances of that? ... How risky is that action? ... Which of these options is the most popular one, and why? ... How should I decide?

by Dr Tim Rakow



These are examples of the questions addressed by research into judgement and decision making (JDM) – and these are the kinds of questions that I research. Part of the appeal of JDM is exploring similar kinds of decision in very different settings. For instance, I've assessed poker players' estimates of the probability of winning for dif-

ferent hands of cards; and have analysed surgeons' estimates of the probability of bad outcomes from surgery for patients with different characteristics. You might like to speculate about which domain has the best quality judgement, and why!

JDM research often calls for a variety of methods to explore an issue: using carefully controlled lab experiments to examine the basic mechanisms that drive judgements and choices; or conducting field studies to learn how experienced decision makers make some specialist assessment or decision. Two recent studies with project students illustrate this variety of methods for a given question. Both studies explored how people weigh a small amount of information about the recent past against a larger amount of information from further back in time when they must act based on what they think is likely to happen next. In one study, we devised a simple computer-based choice task – a bit like a slot machine game – where participants could see what had happened

in the past and use this to choose which option was best for the future. In the other study, we gave psychiatric nurses and clinical psychologists details of the recent and distant past history of different patients' behaviour, and asked them to assess the chance of future violent behaviour by these patients. In each case, the "balance" between the recent and distant past shifted depending upon the characteristics of the task or the particular assessment that was required.

JDM research present lots of puzzles for psychologists to seek to solve: it's often difficult to work out how people make decisions. Part of the enjoyment of this area of research is seeking to solve these puzzles – not least, in order to work out how best to approach life's important decisions!

You will learn about JDM research in your cognitive psychology and social psychology modules, and can gain more in-depth knowledge of this research area by taking the Year 3 option in JDM.

## Something to know before your first lecture

by Natalie Kwok

Most Psychology students have had a conversation where the conversing person has a misconceived idea of what's involved in a psychology degree. They often presume you regularly practice mind reading, study mental health issues and do nothing for the rest of the year. For most first year students you've probably done A-level psychology and had a taster of the upcoming year. While a handful of you (including me) entered into psychology without any previous study at all. So what should we expect from this degree?

I remember the start of my first week of lectures. I had a layman's idea of what I would be

learning like the description above. My naïve perception of psychology changed after being told that we have a math test next week to see if we required additional help on our statistic module. And the surprise didn't end there. The next following months, the lectures went through the anatomy of the eye to a brief physics description on light particles.

This may sound quite daunting and overwhelming for those who haven't even stepped into the lectures hall yet but I promise it's not as intimidating as it sounds. Although your first year does not count toward your final degree, it still plays an integral role in your course. What you learn in the first year is the basis of what you will use and need for the second and third year of study. So why am I telling you this? Sometimes not having your expectation met is very disappointing and

discouraging. Hopefully by informing you will allow preparation for new types of knowledge and learning.

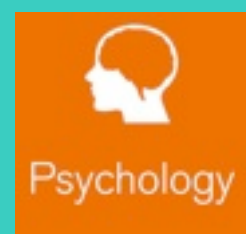
This brings me back to the original question, what should you expect? You should expect psychology to encompass a wide area of knowledge on the human brain from the physical aspect to the functionality of the brain. In addition, the course develops both quantitative and qualitative skills that allow you to be confident researchers. Most of us didn't choose psychology with the aim to become a research psychologist. However, the skills developed in this course put us at an advantage with employers than most degree because we write as much as we do math! So when you find yourself at position overwhelmed with numbers and photons, remember what you learn now will pay off in the long run.

## News in brief

- Prof Debi Roberson and a colleague in CSEE have been awarded £6,600 by the Ageing and Assisted Living Seedcorn Fund for a study to investigate the possibility of reducing tremor in patients with Parkinson's disease by using brain computer interfaces.
- Prof Arnold Wilkins, Prof Sheina Orbell and a colleague in HHS have been awarded £4801 by the Ageing and Assisted Living Seedcorn Fund for a study to investigate the use of precision tinted lenses by migraine patients to reduce headache, photophobia and functional disability.
- The Psychology Freshers' Welcome Website can be found at [www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/department/freshers/Welcome.html](http://www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/department/freshers/Welcome.html)

## Mark the date!

- A Department of Psychology *Meet & Greet* event will take place **October 17th between 2:30 pm and 4:00 pm** in rooms 5.300 A and B. All students and staff are welcome to attend. We will serve coffee, tea, and biscuits and you will have the opportunity to get to know fellow students and staff. We hope to see you all there!



## 60 seconds with new lecturer Dr Gethin Hughes

**If you have to star in a Disney or Pixar movie, which movie and character would it be?**



It would be great to be Crush, the turtle in Finding Nemo. He must have

seen and experienced so many cool things spending his days riding the EAC (duuude)! In fact, I would love to be any character from this great film!

**What's your favourite book of all time?** I think I would struggle to give an all time favourite but I'll give you a few books that I have enjoyed recently. I really liked the Phillip Pullman "His Dark Materials" trilogy. I also really love P. G. Wodehouse's "Jeeves" Stories.

**If you were a Superhero, what would be your superpower?** I think it would have to be tele-transportation to be able to quickly distribute food, water and other aid to all the people in the world less fortunate than ourselves. This would also allow me to easily visit friends and family around the world.

**Who influences you the most and why?** My mother, for showing me that no problem is too big and that with determination

and hard work you can achieve anything.

**If you could do whatever you want right now, what would you be doing?** I love getting out and enjoying nature/ the natural environment and seeing (as well as photographing) all the amazing animals on our planet, so I would say either Scuba diving (in Australia, Madagascar, South America), kayaking with Orcas in Canada or being on safari in Africa.

**What's your favourite song?** For me a great song is all about the memories it invokes and the emotions that it elicits. Based on that I'll go with É isso aí by Ana Carolina and Seu Jorge, discovered on a perfect holiday in Brazil.

## Join the Psychology Newsletter Group

Since the birth of the psychology department's newsletter in September 2011, it has continued to grow. The PNG are now looking to recruit new members and are looking for candidates to fill the following posts:

- *Design and production*
- *Assistant editors for research related matters*
- *Assistant editors for student related matters*
- *Editor for miscellaneous articles*
- *Photography*

The PNG produce a monthly newsletter to keep everyone with an interest in psychology up-to-date. Natalie Kwok is editor for research and produces articles to keep us informed of the research happening in our department. Lisa Phillips is editor for student matters and includes articles that are related or of interest to our large student body. Graduate Shannon Jackman has contributed book and film reviews, and "60 seconds with..." and other interesting features. The group is supervised by Dr Silke Paulmann.

The team meet every month to plan the next edition. This month we meet on October 10th at 3:00 pm in 2.711. This meeting is open to everyone so feel free to drop-in whether you want to get a better idea of what's involved,

share your ideas, or write an article or interview. Meetings last about an hour and are relaxed with hot drinks and snacks available.

The friendly team has a good rapport with staff members and being a volunteer provides the opportunity to improve writing skills and gain experience of team-work and meeting deadlines, and is a good talking point on your CV.

If you are interested in applying for any of the available posts, please come to our next meeting or email Dr Paulmann by October 20th. Applicants are expected to be able to commit five hours per month. However, if you would prefer not to have a dedicated role but write articles occasionally please specify that you would like to apply to join as a *news reporter*.