



Northeastern University

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Psych NUws: The Newsletter of the Northeastern  
University Psychology Department

Department of Psychology

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September 01, 2003

# Psych NUws : Volume 10, Number 1

Northeastern University

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## Recommended Citation

Northeastern University, "Psych NUws : Volume 10, Number 1" (2003). *Psych NUws: The Newsletter of the Northeastern University Psychology Department*. Paper 1. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20000196>

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# *Psych* *NUws*

**The Newsletter of the  
Northeastern University  
Psychology Department**  
Volume 10, Number 1 (September,  
2003)

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## **From the Editor**

This, our first Fall in the semester system, is also the TENTH ANNIVERSARY of **Psych NUws**! So we can congratulate ourselves on all the work it took to achieve semester conversion and also on the many, many articles and news items we have published in this newsletter over the years. Many people have contributed, to whom we say THANK YOU and KEEP IT COMING! We are always wanting submissions of interesting material relevant to Psychology to print. (If it's funny, I might print it whether it's relevant to Psychology or not!)

Undergrads are especially encouraged to write for us!! Bring your ideas to me and they will be very welcome.

--Prof. Hall

## **From the Chair**

Welcome to a new year in the Psychology Department!! If we can make our first year in semesters as successful as our last year in quarters, we will have another great year! Last year's entering class consisted of around 130 students, once again helping to make Psychology one of the largest majors in the University with around 600 majors. We welcomed 37 new members to Psi Chi, the Psychology honorary society, and the Psychology Club had another great year topped off by the annual trip to the Eastern Psychological Association, held in Baltimore last April.

One hundred and twenty two of your classmates graduated in June, around 50% with honors. We expect the members of this class to repeat the successes of their predecessors. Even

as you read this column, some of the students are starting graduate school at Boston College, Boston University, Johns Hopkins, Florida International University, Northeastern, and other places. Many others are working in mental health positions and taking a variety of other jobs. We will be keeping track of what they are up to, and we'll let you know. After all, you'll be following in their footsteps in just a few years. In fact, if you would like to speak to one of these students, please let me know and we'll put you in touch. Our graduates are always eager to help our current students.

And this year? The entering class, once again, is large with around 140 students (freshmen plus transfers). And, once again, we look forward to the graduation of another large and talented class. But this graduation will be in early May, not the middle of June. In fact, classes will be over before the beginning of May. This change to semesters will be quite an adjustment for us all. (I think it may take me a few years to get used to this.)

I'm sure you're well aware of the changes in our curriculum that resulted from our move to semesters. Here are some of the salient differences. We have added a laboratory to the Statistics course, which will meet once a week. Stat classes will have only around 40 students, and there will be around 20 students in the laboratory. This lab is meant to give you hands-on experience with the statistical techniques that you will be learning in the class. We want you to take this course in the fall of your sophomore year. This way you won't be struggling as a senior to get into that last research course. I would be a rich man if I had a dollar for every time I have talked to one of your classmates about this problem. Let's make sure that it doesn't happen to you. As to area courses, we now require two courses in both Area A (e.g., Personality, Social Psychology) and Area

B (e.g., Psychology of Language, Psychobiology). The requirements have not changed for research laboratories (3 for B.S.; 2 for B.A.) or seminars (1 for B.A. and B.S.). I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to put off taking your seminar until late in your career, when you will be better able to take advantage of all of the other courses that you have taken. Finally, the elective requirement has been reduced (from 7 to 4 for the B.S. and from 5 to 3 for the B.A.). If you have any questions about the new curriculum, please see your advisor (and I'm quite sure that you have done so long before now). Please remember that our goal is to make the move from quarters to semesters a seamless one for you, and we think that we can if you let us help.

This year the Psychology Club will continue its wide range of activities (e.g., from attending Blue Man Group to seminars about preparing for graduate school to attending the Eastern Psychological Association meetings). I strongly encourage you to participate in the club. Northeastern can be a big place. The club provides the opportunity for you to become part of a community made up of peers with similar interests. Meetings are held every other week in the Psychology Lounge (and a free lunch is provided). We also will have an induction for students who qualify for membership in Psi Chi. If you are interested, please pick up an application form in the Psychology Office (125 NI), and/or go by and see the Psi Chi advisor, Professor Colvin. (Also see the article later in this issue.)

We also continue to use our Department website ([www.psych.neu.edu](http://www.psych.neu.edu)) to provide information and to make available a range of opportunities to you. For example, as has been the case in the past, we have a listing of all of the courses that will be offered throughout

the year. You can also view sample syllabi for these courses.

Last year I wrote about a certificate program in Applied Behavioral Analysis, a description of which can be seen on our website under the Research heading (Behavior Analysis Training). This program is attracting lots of interest. You should take a look at it. In brief, students take two courses taught by faculty from the Department of Applied and Counseling Psychology (in the Bouve College of Health Sciences), which are counted as psychology electives in our department. After taking the first course, students are eligible to participate in co-op or internship placements in which they get direct experience in the field in using behavioral techniques with autistic children. The second course can be taken at the same time the field experience is underway or it can precede it. After the courses and field experience, the students are eligible to take a licensure examination, which, if passed, results in the conferral of a certificate as an Associate Behavior Analyst. Students with this certification will be quite competitive for employment upon graduation. The first groups of students began the course sequence in 2001, and enrollments this fall have doubled from the year before.

We are continuing our Peer Mentoring program for the fifth year. Upperclass Psychology majors will be available to answer questions, tutor, and provide advice. Please keep in mind that these students are available, not only for academic tutoring, but also to talk about issues of concern to you. We are here to help you with your problems, but you may be more comfortable talking to a peer. If so, take advantage of the peer mentors. The peer mentors can also help make you aware of the wide range of opportunities that the Department and the University have to offer. We encourage you to take advantage of this unique program. To

do so, you should go to our website, and click on Peer Mentoring. (If you would like to serve as a peer mentor, please contact Professor Block, our Head Advisor.)

Finally, I would like to point out that on the homepage of our website you will find **Contact the Chair**. You can send me e-mail by clicking on this. I hope that you do. Comments and feedback about any aspect of our program would be helpful to me. I will be happy to answer your questions, or to direct you to someone who can. I hope that you take advantage of all of the opportunities that you can, and then let us know what you think about them. In later issues of this newspaper I will be updating you on other initiatives as the year unfolds. Good luck in the coming year, and remember to let me know how things are going.

--Prof. Harkins

## Headlines You'll Never See in Psych NUws

In my lab, we study language and, among other issues, we examine how people construct a meaning for a sentence as they are hearing or reading it. One of the main issues that comes up in this area is how to deal with ambiguity -- situations in which a sequence of words can have multiple possible meanings. How people handle ambiguities can tell us a lot about how the language comprehension system

works. To learn more about these issues, you can take Psychology of Language (PSYU464) or come by and talk to me about working in the lab, doing a directed study, etc. In the

meantime, though, you can take advantage of ambiguity's entertainment value by reading the newspaper headlines below. They're cases culled from various newspapers over the years (not necessarily by me). With most of them, you'll probably discover that, at a minimum, your comprehension system doesn't always choose the most sensible interpretation for an ambiguity.

*Baseball Stars Man Flood Help Phones  
Kicking Baby Considered to be Healthy  
Man Shoots Neighbor with Machete  
Police Begin Campaign to Run Down  
Jaywalkers  
Safety Experts Say School Bus  
Passengers Should Be Belted  
Drunk Gets Nine Months in Violin Case  
Survivor of Siamese Twins Joins Parents  
Farmer Bill Dies in House  
Iraqi Head Seeks Arms  
Is There a Ring of Debris around  
Uranus?  
Stud Tires Out  
Prostitutes Appeal to Pope  
Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes  
Over  
Soviet Virgin Lands Short of Goal Again  
British Left Waffles on Falkland Islands  
Lung Cancer in Women Mushrooms  
Eye Drops Off Shelf  
Teacher Strikes Idle Kids  
Reagan Wins on Budget, But More Lies  
Ahead  
Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim  
Shot Off Women's Leg Helps Nicklaus to  
66  
Enraged Cow Injures Farmer with Ax  
Miners Refuse to Work after Death  
Juvenile Court to Try Shooting  
Defendant  
Stolen Painting Found by Tree  
Two Soviet Ships Collide, One Dies  
Two Sisters Reunited after 18 Years in  
Checkout Counter  
Killer Sentenced to Die for Second Time  
in 10 Years  
Never Withhold Herpes Infection from  
Loved One  
Drunken Drivers Paid \$1000 in '84  
Red Tape Holds Up New Bridge  
Deer Kill 17,000*

*Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery;  
Hundreds Dead  
Man Stuck by Lightning Faces Battery  
Charge  
New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger  
Test Group  
Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in  
Spacecraft  
Kids Make Nutritious Snacks  
Chef Throws His Heart into Helping  
Feed  
Needy  
Arson Suspect is Held in Massachusetts  
Fire  
British Union Finds Dwarfs in Short  
Supply  
Ban On Soliciting Dead in Trotwood  
Lansing Residents Can Drop Off Tree  
Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half  
New Vaccine May Contain Rabies  
Man Minus Ear Waives Hearing  
Deaf College Opens Doors to Hearing  
Air Head Fired  
Steals Clock, Faces Time  
Prosecutor Releases Probe into  
Undersheriff  
Old School Pillars are Replaced by  
Alumni  
Bank Drive-in Window Blocked by Board  
Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors  
Some Pieces of Rock Hudson Sold at  
Auction  
Sex Education Delayed, Teachers  
Request Training  
Include your Children When Baking  
Cookies  
4-H Girls Win Prizes for Fat Calves  
Crack Found on Governor's Daughter*

--Prof. Pearlmutter

**Important Co-op  
Information for  
Psychology and  
BNS students who  
want to participate**

# in Co-op Spring/Summer 1 (January – July 2004)

If you would like to be on co-op starting in January 2004 (Spring Semester), you must attend one of our MANDATORY preparation meetings.

Friday, September 19, 2–3pm,  
Location: TBA

Wednesday, September 24, 12–1pm,  
Location: TBA

Thursday, September 25, 3–4pm,  
Location: TBA

Please look for signs around the Psychology department for more details.

**\*\*\*Please note that if you do not attend one of these meetings, you will not be able to participate in co-op for Spring/Summer 1 time period.\*\*\***

Cynthia Crespin, Psychology (A–Ma)  
[c.crespin@neu.edu](mailto:c.crespin@neu.edu)  
617–373–3456

Michelle Israel, Psychology (Mc–Z)  
and BNS (All)  
[m.israel@neu.edu](mailto:m.israel@neu.edu)  
617–373–3464

## A Brief History of Psi Chi (and an announcement)

Psi Chi is the national honor society for psychology students. The idea for Psi Chi came about in 1927. Two psychology students, Frederick Lewis

and Edwin Newman, were working in the basement of a laboratory at the University of Kansas. Lewis was disappointed that an honor society did not exist and conveyed this to Newman. Newman basically told Lewis to “put up or shut up” and challenged Lewis to start the ball rolling.

In 1928 a survey was conducted to determine the interest in a new psychology honor society. The results were encouraging but by no means was there unanimous support. For example, the well-known psychologist E.G. Boring responded “My own personal view, of which I shall speak first, is one of increased despair at the thought of this new fraternity... I shall not send your [survey] to any member of our staff [at Harvard] and my reason is itself enlightening. One does not bother colleagues by bothering them with things that they would scorn, ...that it would seem discourteous to try to shift this problem to them.” Obviously, not everyone shared Boring’s somewhat nasty opinion.

The following year, the organization was established and although the name Psi Chi was considered, it was already in use by a fraternity in Oregon. As a result, in 1929 the organization was known as Sigma Pi. However, in 1930, J.P. Guilford discovered that the fraternity known as Psi Chi had disbanded and the name was available. The honor society known as Sigma Pi was short lived and changed its name to Psi Chi that same year.

By 1932 there were 24 chapters and 474 members. From this modest beginning, Psi Chi has grown to more than 950 chapters and about 330,000 members. Despite E.G. Boring’s early doubts, thousands of students have been initiated into and enjoyed their participation in the world’s largest psychological association.

Which brings me to my next point. We have a Psi Chi chapter here at Northeastern University and we would like you to apply for membership. If you are a psychology major and have taken some psychology courses and have an overall GPA of 3.0 and a psychology GPA of 3.2 or better, you might be eligible to join Psi Chi. To obtain more information on eligibility requirements, get a Psi Chi information packet located in the hanging metal file folder at the end of the counter in the Psychology Department main office. Or feel free to contact Professor Randy Colvin, the Psi Chi faculty advisor, at [R.Colvin@neu.edu](mailto:R.Colvin@neu.edu) or x3098.

--Prof. Colvin

## **Things You Cannot “See” Can Influence Thoughts and Attitudes That You May Not Know You Have**

Have you ever considered that things that you don't “see” have an effect on what you “think,” how you “feel,” and who you “like” or “don't like?” Have you ever stopped to reflect on whether you have unconscious negative attitudes about different groups of people (e.g., “smart people,” “Black people,” “homosexuals”) that you believe you have positive attitudes towards?

I recently had the pleasure, or should I say fortune, of taking a course in Boulder, Colorado which forced me to

consider and reckon with the reality that subliminal messages do indeed have an effect on my thoughts and behavior, and that what I think my attitudes are, are not the whole story. Enter the unconscious mind-- you know, the bath water you threw out with the Freud-baby?

Three driving forces in implicit social cognition research, Mahzarin Banaji, Irene Blair, and Brian Nosek, instructed the course I took focusing on themes such as: (a) free will—that is, do we really “choose” to be who we are, think what we think, and feel what we feel? Or are such traits, thoughts, and experiences guided by our social worlds? (b) Unconscious attitudes—or, the attitudes that we don't know or aren't willing to admit that we have, (c) the ways in which subliminal messages influence our cognition and behavior, and (d) the malleability of unconscious attitudes—or, the ways in which subtle aspects of our social world can easily change our seemingly stable unconscious attitudes.

Through our readings we discovered that subliminally presenting words like “hostile” and “fight” to people made them rate a target person as being more hostile after reading an ambiguous story about him. The mechanism by which this effect occurs is thought to occur through our memory systems, where the subliminally presented message, or prime, activates certain ideas and concepts in our minds which then guide our attention, perception, and interpretation of events in our lives. What this means in terms of everyday life is that after watching a violent movie or watching two people fight on the street, we might interpret a waitperson's “forgetting” our Corona as “oh, he has a bad attitude and doesn't care about our table—no 20% tip for him!” We also read that by subliminally presenting people with stimuli associated with “competition,” we can increase those people's degree of

competition in a subsequent game. So, before your next big soccer match or Tomb Raider game, be sure to watch “Rocky IV” and “8 Mile!”

In the implicit social cognition course, we also conducted some of this type of research ourselves. Three of the projects in our course included subliminal priming manipulations—and you will never believe what some of us found! One group found that by subliminally presenting stimuli associated with “death,” people were more likely to have positive attitudes towards words associated with “family” as opposed to words associated with “friends.” I wonder how many of us have called our parents or siblings after watching “ER?” Thought you just wanted to see how they were doing huh? Nope, you may have just been primed with concepts of death! Another group found that by subliminally exposing people to novel Korean ideographs (they look like Chinese “characters”) a bunch of times, made those people say that they liked those ideographs more. This is a classic social psychological effect known as the “mere exposure effect” and what it means in everyday life is that so—and—so at work did, indeed, “just grow on you,” and you have been growing in your liking for him/her with each and every exposure!

Although this course may not be offered again, do not despair! There are tons of articles that you can read that will tell you all about implicit social cognition research, and there are a couple of websites dedicated to the subject matter as well. If you are interested in further reading, be sure to check out work by Mahzarin Banaji, John Bargh, Irene Blair, Tanya Chartrand, Patricia Devine, Russell Fazio, Anthony Greenwald, Brian Nosek, and Robert Zajonc (to name a few). And to explore your own unconscious mind, be sure to check out the following two websites:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/index.jsp>  
<http://www.tolerance.org/>

--Dana R. Carney

## Directed Study: Psychology Outside the Classroom

Many students don’t realize that most Psychology Professors lead double lives. Teaching in the classroom is just a part of what we do. No, no, we don’t prowling the seamy underside of Boston at night in outrageous costumes fighting crime (or at least we’re hesitant to admit it). Rather, in addition to classroom teaching, most Psychology Faculty have their own laboratories in which they conduct state-of-the-art research. Topics range from how experience influences children’s reasoning about nature to nonverbal communication to the effects of cocaine on aggression in hamsters. And the beauty of it is, there are LOTS of opportunities for undergraduate students to play significant roles in this research, not just as participants in the subject pool, but as investigators.

One of the best ways to do so is to take a DIRECTED STUDY.

### What is Directed Study?

“Directed Study” is the official name for working with a professor on that professor’s research for course credit. It will show up on your schedule as PSY U924. Unlike other classes, there’s usually no set meeting time; you work out specifics with your faculty mentor. What you actually do on a directed study

is work with a Psychology faculty member on his or her research. Often, you will also be working with one or more of the doctoral students in that lab, who take great interest in the undergrads and are excellent mentors and role models. Beyond that, your responsibilities may vary immensely depending on who you're working with or what you're working on. You might be involved in designing and setting up studies, running experiments, attending lab meetings, doing library research, coding, entering and analyzing data, arguing about results and interpretations of findings, or presenting the research at local, regional, or national scientific meetings. But whatever the specifics, you will be immersed in the process of real psychological research.

### **Why Should I Take a Directed Study?**

There are lots of reasons why Directed Study is an excellent addition to your course of studies as a Psychology major. The most important reason is that you will gain an entirely different perspective on psychological science. Rather than sitting in a classroom learning about psychology, you will be in the lab DOING psychological research. You'll also build on the analytical thinking skills you've been developing in class. Apart from these, there are more tangible benefits as well. Directed Study counts as a Psychology Lab toward fulfilling your degree requirements. If you don't need another lab, it can also count as a Psychology elective. If you're thinking about graduate study in Psychology or a related field, research experience is critical, and Directed Study gets you just that. It also gives you a chance to work under a faculty member, which means that you'll have someone who knows you well and can spell out your strengths in detail when it comes time to ask for reference letters for jobs or graduate school applications.

Another good result of doing Directed Study is that it can help you to find out what areas of Psychology you are most interested in. You may discover that you like your Cognitive Psychology experience more than your Social Psychology experience, and this self-knowledge will help you greatly in planning your future.

### **How Do I Get Involved?**

You can't register yourself for a Directed Study. You have to take the initiative to seek out a faculty member to work with. If there's a professor you've had that you particularly liked, talk with them about their own research. If you've taken a class that's sparked your interest, talk with the professor who taught it; chances are they're working on related research. Occasionally there are announcements posted around the department looking for Directed Study students. There is also information on the Psychology website, and there's a booklet in the Psychology Office with descriptions of each professor's research. There is always lots of research going on in the department. The important thing is, you need to take the initiative to talk to professors, discover what possibilities might appeal to you, and get involved. You'll be glad you did.

--Prof. Coley

## **False Memories: Grand Illusions of Psychological Life, Or, Notice Whom You Shake**

# Hands with at Disneyland

Prof. Elizabeth Loftus, Distinguished Professor at the University of California, Irvine, studies memory, especially constructed and false memories. Her ingenious experiments have persuaded many of the now-accepted truth that memory is not just a faithful “playback” of events that happened. Rather, information or suggestions entering the mind since or even right at the present can distort our understanding to the point that we think things happened differently than they did, or even that things happened to us that didn’t happen at all.

In some of her research, she tells participants that she has talked with older relatives of theirs, who told a story about the time the participant got lost in the shopping mall. In other experiments, participants are told they had been hospitalized overnight, that they had an embarrassing accident at a family wedding, or even that they were once the victims of a vicious animal attack. Typically, a significant minority of participants (usually between 20% and 40%), will develop partial or complete false memories. Some of these are what Loftus calls “rich false memories” in which the person can feel confident, provide details, even express emotions about events that never happened.

To be sure that what is being recalled are false memories and not things that had actually happened but were previously forgotten, other experiments use events in the laboratory itself. After being asked to both do and imagine doing various tasks, at a later date participants will believe they actually did things that in fact they had only imagined doing.

In another series of experiments, the researchers plant the seeds of false memory by showing the participants fake ads for a Walt Disney resort. The ads showed Bugs Bunny, who, as a Warner Brothers character, would never appear at a Walt Disney park. Later, when asked about their actual childhood visits to Disneyland, between 16% and 36% of participants, depending on how many times they were shown the fake ads, said they remembered meeting Bugs Bunny at Disneyland. Amazingly, 62% remembered shaking his hand, 46% remembered hugging him, and nearly 25% remembered touching his ear or tail or hearing him say “What’s Up, Doc?”

So, next time you or your friend says, “Oh, I remember that!”---think again.

--Summarized from the APS  
*Observer*, August 2003

## So, You Want to Go to Grad School?

Many undergrads wonder if graduate school is the right choice for them. The answer is very clear: It depends. If you want any sort of career in academic psychology (research, teaching, etc.), then chances are you will need some sort of graduate degree. If you want to counsel people or become a clinician, the same is true. This article is intended for those interested in research and teaching.

How do you figure out the answer in the first place? Research is a big part of getting your PhD (or even your MA), so if research doesn’t really do it for you, think long and hard about spending the next five years of your life being

dedicated to it. Regional and national events, like the APS or APA national conventions, are a wonderful way to learn how graduate students and faculty spend their time.

There are plenty of other resources to help you figure out whether graduate school is the right place for you. Your professors and the grad students in your department, for example, would be more than happy to sit down with you and discuss your future educational plans. The Student Caucus Web site of the American Psychological Society has contact information for a number of graduate student mentors who can answer questions about anything from the application process to the nuts and bolts of daily graduate student life. There are also books about gaining admission to graduate school; one in particular is *Getting In: A Step-By-Step Plan for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology*.

Once you decide that graduate school is the right place for you, you have to figure out where to go, how to get there, and how to pay for it. One excellent rule of thumb about choosing a graduate program is to apply to a professor, not a school. Many times who you are working with is more important than where you are working. So start reading the relevant literature and see what names keep popping up in the areas that interest you the most. You may also wish to consider a program's national ranking (*US News and World Report* publishes an annual ranking) and how much federal and private funding the department receives.

So how do you get in? There are a number of good books with details on the process. The four things that every graduate school is going to look at (in no particular order) are GPA, GRE scores, research experience, and letters of recommendation.

Once you've been accepted, you have to figure out how to pay for it. If you plan to stop after your master's degree, you may just be able to take out loans. Funding a PhD is a bit more daunting. No one wants to take out loans for another five years. Fortunately, the selectivity of doctoral programs works in your favor. A typical graduate program prospectus says the department is committed to funding graduate students for a period of five years. Basically, the department wants you to find all the funding you can through agencies like the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, but in fact it is more likely for students to be supported through teaching and research assistantships. You could easily receive tuition remission as well as a living stipend.

--Adapted from the APS  
Observer, June 2003.

## OPPORTUNITIES

The Speech Perception Lab needs you if American English is your native language, you have no speech or hearing disorders, and you are between 18 and 45 years of age. We pay \$10/hr for one or two hour experiments, scheduled at your convenience. Call 373-4462 for details.

If you are looking for an exciting and rewarding part-time or full-time job, co-op, or internship, visit our new Applied Behavior Analysis Therapist Job Center: [www.abajobcenter.org](http://www.abajobcenter.org). View behavior therapist job openings in school or home-based settings; post your resume information for potential employers to view; explore jobs that offer training and competitive salaries. Post your information and spread the word to other students and recent grads!!

**Psych NUws** is a joint effort of the faculty, graduate and

*undergraduate students, and staff of the Northeastern University Psychology Department. Direct all inquiries and contributions to the Editor, Prof. Judith Hall. We especially welcome contributions from undergraduates!*

*We like humor (all sorts) and anything relevant to Psychology: anecdotes, summaries of research, tips on career development, news on what you are doing, announcements, opportunities, and more!!*