



Northeastern University

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Psych NUws: The Newsletter of the Northeastern  
University Psychology Department

Department of Psychology

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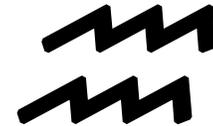
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# Psych

# NUWS



## *The Newsletter of the Northeastern University Psychology Department Volume 12, Number 1 (September 2005)*

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### *From the Acting Chair*

Greetings, and welcome to a new year in the Psychology Department. Professor Harkins, our Chair, is on Sabbatical this semester and I am serving as the Acting Chair. Last year was another exciting and productive one in the department, and we expect more of the same this year.

### **New Faculty Member**

Please join me in welcoming our newest faculty member, Dr. Nancy Kim. Dr. Kim comes to the Psychology Department from the Rochester Institute of Technology, where she was previously an assistant professor for 2 years. She received her Ph.D. from Yale Univ. and her B.A. from Harvard Univ. She is

interested in how people think and reason about the world around them. Specifically, her research focuses on how professional clinicians and lay people explain mental disorders and diseases, and how these explanations affect their diagnosis decisions and health behaviors. For example, her studies have shown that clinical psychologists generate false memories of symptoms in hypothetical patients, based on the clinicians' own prior theories and expectations about what symptoms are most important to the disorder. She is also interested in how cognitive research on thinking and reasoning applies to social psychology problems such as stereotyping and person perception. She enjoys teaching and working with students (anyone looking for Directed Study opportunities?), and will be teaching Cognition and the undergraduate seminar in Cognition this

year. Dr. Kim says that she is a huge fan of both Jane Austen and martial arts movies, which strikes me as a fun combination (imagine the movie: tea and kick boxing!). Welcome, Dr. Kim!

### **Psychology Club**

The Psych Club meets at least six times a semester in the Psychology Lounge or another nearby venue (depending on the size of the meeting). The Psychology Club lets you directly influence your academic life during your undergraduate career. You can meet other students who have interests similar to yours and get to know future colleagues. You will learn ways to easily deal with Departmental and University requirements, and get information about careers in psychology, applying to graduate school, psychology coops and much more. Interesting and fun extracurricular activities along with a yearly road trip to the Eastern Psychological Association meeting are also important benefits of membership. Lunch (free!) and conversation are provided at all meetings. The Psych Club is a great way to find out about the many opportunities available to you in our Department. Your membership in the Psych Club is free and an integral part of majoring in Psychology at Northeastern.

### **Peer Mentoring**

For the seventh year, our peer mentoring program will be available. Upperclass psychology majors will be available to answer questions, tutor, and provide advice. These students are available not only for academic tutoring, but also to talk about other concerns that you may have. Of course, the faculty and staff are available to help with your problems, but you may feel more comfortable discussing some issues with your peers -- and the peer mentors are the perfect choice in that case. These mentors can also help make you aware of the wide range of opportunities that are available to you within the Department. We encourage you to take advantage of this great program. To do so, go to our website and click on Peer Mentoring. Please note: if you would like to serve as a peer mentor (great experience for a career in counseling, educational psychology, and more!), contact Professor Block, our head advisor.

### **Department Website**

Don't forget to visit [www.psych.neu.edu](http://www.psych.neu.edu), where you can find more information about the faculty and their research interests, the courses offered by the department and our graduation requirements, and much more.

There is a tremendous range of opportunities available to you in our Department. Take advantage of them!

--Prof. Eskew, Acting Chair

## ***Faculty Profile:***

### ***Dr. Jay McLaughlin***

Prof. McLaughlin joined us last year and already quite a few students have had the good fortune to be in his classes or work in his lab. Prof. McLaughlin's research bridges biology and behavior. In fact, his PhD is in biology and he could have stayed squarely in that area, either in academia or in the pharmaceutical industry. But, watching his grandmother, who had schizophrenia, started him puzzling over the mysterious links between brain and behavior at an early age.

He considered clinical psychology or psychiatry as a way to help people and also serve his own curiosity, but decided that science was the way to help at a more fundamental level. "Clinical psychology makes a difference, too," he says, "but only one person at a time." His research addresses basic questions on how the brain works to produce behavior, both normal and maladaptive. He is especially interested in why people get addicted to drugs and why they get depressed, and how understanding the brain can contribute to producing the best possible pharmacological treatments.

Dr. McLaughlin spent his early life in Hartford and then moved to California in high school, where he earned his BA in biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and went on to earn his PhD in neuroscience at the University of Rochester. When asked how he picked his major, he said he played with several majors, including psychology and English literature, but chose

biology partly because of an inspirational professor who encouraged him and gave him guidance toward graduate studies.

Prof. McLaughlin welcomes interest from undergraduates who might want to work in his lab. Students run experiments, do behavioral coding on mice, and follow drug protocols in studying effects of cocaine and other drugs on the mouse brain.

For students interested in a different direction—towards a therapy or a clinical/counseling career—Prof. McLaughlin also offers a valuable opportunity: He invites students to ask advice from his wife Olivia, who is a licensed clinical social worker. Clinical social work is one of the main avenues for developing a career as a therapist. Many of our students are interested in learning more about this kind of career so take advantage of this kind offer!

Prof. McLaughlin is very impressed with the quality of our undergraduates, but he does express an occasional misgiving. “I’m deeply concerned that none of them has seen *Casablanca!*” So here’s a tip: Go to the video store and then go visit him.

## ***Important Co-op Announcements***

Hi all—

I hope you had a wonderful summer! For students who are interested in going on co-op for Spring/Summer 1 (January 2, 2006 – June 23, 2006) you must attend one of the MANDATORY meetings:

Friday, Sept. 16, 3:00–4:30, 274 NI  
Wednesday, Sept. 21, 12–1:30, 274 NI  
Thursday, Sept. 22, 3:00–4:30, 274 NI

Please make an appointment with your co-op faculty as soon as possible. Appointments fill up fast!!

Psychology students A–Ma: Cynthia Crespin, 154 NI, 373–3456, [c.crespin@neu.edu](mailto:c.crespin@neu.edu)

Psychology students Mc–Z: Michelle Israel, 151 NI, 373–3464, [m.israel@neu.edu](mailto:m.israel@neu.edu)

Behavioral Neuroscience (All): see Michelle Israel

Linguistics (All): see Cynthia Crespin

--Michelle Israel, Cooperative  
Education Coordinator

## ***News of Our Grads:***

### ***Kathryn Lou, '04***

After graduating, I moved down to Philadelphia and began interviewing for research assistant/coordinator positions at the local universities and hospitals to try to gain research experience. NU co-op positions had given me a great resume; however, I was still lacking the relevant research experience that graduate school programs look for. I applied for positions at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, Temple University and Jefferson University. After a few months of interviewing and part-time work, I accepted a position as a research assistant at the University of Pennsylvania in the Department of Psychiatry. I work in the Psychopathology Research Unit under Dr. Aaron T. Beck on several studies that examine the effects of cognitive therapy on suicide attempters. Our studies include adult participants that have made a recent suicide attempt, participants diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder with recent suicide attempts and cognitive therapy for Schizophrenia. In addition, two new studies are beginning under a recently acquired grant, cognitive therapy for suicide attempters with substance addiction and cognitive therapy for suicidal elderly men. I recruit and consent patients that are entering our main study and also serve as a case manager, tracking, providing referrals and scheduling therapy for participants.

In addition, there is ample opportunity to work with associate research professors and post-doctoral fellows on other projects. Some enable me to attend conferences and

present posters and even gain authorship on papers being submitted to journals.

The associate research professors and post-doctoral fellows are great mentors and sounding boards to help decide upon future plans. They had valuable insight on grad school applications and are instrumental in helping me become a great candidate for admission. I plan on applying during Fall 2005 to enter a program Fall 2006. I am applying to Clinical Psychology Ph.D. programs around the country. In addition, with the advice of post-docs and professors, I am looking at dual degree programs – such as J.D./Ph.D. programs that open a lot of possibilities and interesting career prospects. Wish me luck!

### *Taylor Anderson, '04*

I knew from my Junior year at Northeastern that I wanted to go on and enter a Masters or PhD program, though I wasn't sure which area I wanted to pursue. Most of my undergraduate research had been in social and personality areas though I had more interest in applied areas. In April of 2004 the Psychology Club attended the Eastern Psychological Association conference in Baltimore and this is where I found the direction I wanted to take. I went to a talk by Dr. Ron Shapiro about Human Factors Psychology and found it engaging and decided to find a Human Factors Psychology Graduate program.

Human Factors is concerned with the interaction between humans and other parts of a system, like computers, machines, and other people. The field tries to increase human well-being and performance by redesigning interfaces, workstations, and other environments. Human Factors plays a large part in aviation design, usability, ergonomics, and interface design (web and software). Two common examples of applied Human Factors research would be the addition of the high-mounted third brake light on automobiles (which are now mandatory), and ergonomic keyboard design (keyboards which are raised in the middle and split).

The Masters program I am currently enrolled in at the University of Dayton has a foundation in theory, but is very applied. Now I am working on a project to redesign the air traffic control system at the Dayton

International Airport. We have visited the radar room and will be evaluated by current air traffic controllers. Human Factors has implications for many industries to increase safety and general usability by the user.

Last semester I took classes in Stats, Engineering Psychology and Questionnaire design, and this semester I am taking Human Factors in Systems Design, Stats II, and Advanced Cognitive Processes.

## *What is Psychology Good For? Reflections 12 Years After Earning the PhD*

As psychology majors you have chosen to study a fascinating subject. There is something in psychology to interest everyone. By the time you graduate you will know a lot about the topic, and it is likely that you will have identified areas of specialty that you will go on to pursue in your career. Importantly, along the way, you will also acquire some additional skills that will make you an extremely valuable contributor no matter what career you embark upon. I want to share with you these essential “tools of the trade.”

My own time at Northeastern was very rewarding. I graduated from the Psychology Department in 1993, having earned my PhD in Professor Joanne Miller's Speech Perception Lab. I have since worked in both academia and industry, and I am frequently asked what aspect of being a psychologist has proven to be the most valuable in my career. Of course, sometimes the question arrives in a different form: “Why should we employ a psychologist?”

The fact is that my reply seldom targets any specific theme of psychology, or even of speech science. Instead, the valuable skills I refer to, skills that you will acquire and which will prepare you for any career, are the following. Your psychology training will give you the ability to...

--solve problems  
--think critically

- find answers to questions
- design investigative research
- analyze and interpret data
- use data to guide decision making
- communicate and argue a stance
- write coherently and convincingly
- persuade others on the basis of evidence

...not to mention giving you a keen eye and ear for what is sometimes diplomatically called “baloney,” and what you may know by another name. I cannot think of another discipline that gives the rigorous training needed in these essential skills, while simultaneously showing you how to apply them to virtually all aspects of human behavior, and thus to all careers.

The corporate world in particular is, sadly, rife with individuals who do not know disciplined decision-making methods, and so do not know how to make critical judgments with any known degree of confidence. Business and industry have popularized “shoot from the hip” and “seat of the pants” approaches, and have characterized the early stages of new projects as “the fuzzy front end” (a euphemism for “does anyone know what we are doing?”). Individuals who can inject clarity of thought into this world of uncertainty, and who can help others (including, and maybe especially, their boss) to shape thinking, strategy, and direction, will become superstars in their new careers.

Though everything that you learn in your psychology degree will stand you in good stead, do not lose sight of the fact that the basic research skills that you will learn and master along the way are not only the essential tools of any trade, they are also the foundation for leadership.

--Philip Hodgson, Whirlpool Corporation (NU Psychology PhD, '93)

## ***Master’s Degree Program in Amsterdam!***

The Free University at Amsterdam offers an outstanding Master’s program in social psychology, with an emphasis on basic, experimental social psychology. Over a two-

year period, students complete courses covering basic content areas (e.g., evolutionary psychology, social neuroscience, social cognition, emotions, relationships, groups), as well as specific skills (data analysis, etc.). Students receive excellent research experience with the faculty. English is the language of the program so don’t worry that your Dutch is a bit rusty.

Application deadline is April 1 for students from the USA. To get more information, contact:

<http://www.psy.vu.nl/faculteit/algemeen/afdelingen/socialpsychology.html>  
Or [www.van.dijk@psy.vu.nl](mailto:www.van.dijk@psy.vu.nl).

## ***Or, You Could Get Your Master’s in Chicago, or Boston!***

Loyola University of Chicago has an applied social psychology master’s program that’s a great way to prepare for a PhD program. Contact Scott Tinsdale (RTINDAL@luc.edu).

Also, Brandeis University has an excellent master’s program in general psychology. It provides students with an understanding of the scientific foundations of psychology as well as direct experience in research methods and independent research with a faculty mentor. Many of their grads go on to PhD programs in psychology. You may enroll on a full-time or part-time basis. If full time, the program takes one year. Application deadline is May 1. Contact:

<http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/psych/masters.html>.

## ***And How About a Master’s in Mental Health and Behavioral Medicine?***

Boston University has a new clinical master's degree program that includes curricula in mental health, behavioral medicine, and neuroscience, and is offered in a dynamic hospital and medical school environment. The coursework is intended to prepare students to provide clinical services to a range of individuals in need of mental health counseling. It is full time for 2 years. Graduates will meet the requirements for independent license eligibility in almost all of the USA. This is the first program of its kind in the USA and makes Boston University a leader in preparing master's level mental health clinicians. Contact Bernice R. Mark at [nicey@bu.edu](mailto:nicey@bu.edu) or call 617-414-2320.

## ***Social Phobia: A Common Problem***

As a graduate student at Florida State University, Richard Heimberg, PhD, was fascinated by the effects of people's intense social anxiety on their relationships. However, in the 1970s, no name existed for this type of anxiety, and Heimberg says many people wrote it off as shyness or a personality trait.

After all, many people get a little anxious when delivering a speech to a crowd. But it's the more severe cases that caused Heimberg concern--when those fears of being judged by others become so persistent and intense that they extend to almost all social situations, from informal conversations to eating in public. People diagnosed with the condition, *social phobia*--also known as social anxiety disorder--may avoid many social situations out of fear that others will notice something unusual about them, like their shaking hands or blushing, and that their actions will embarrass or humiliate them.

To help them overcome the condition, Heimberg, a Temple University psychology professor, has made studying the origins of and treatments for social phobia his life's work.

In 1983, he became the first researcher to receive National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funding to study psychosocial treatments for social phobia after the term first appeared in the third edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980 (DSM-III).

"Dr. Heimberg has made huge contributions to social phobia research, developing a cognitive-behavioral treatment for social phobia and carrying out numerous randomized controlled trials that have demonstrated its effectiveness," says psychologist Jacqueline Persons, PhD, a former president of the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy (AABT) who served with Heimberg on the AABT board. "He has made important contributions to alleviate a great deal of suffering."

Since Heimberg secured the first NIMH social phobia treatment research grant, such funding has been readily available because the condition is quite common: It's the third most prevalent mental disorder behind depression and alcoholism. About 5.3 million American adults have social phobia, which usually begins in childhood or adolescence, according to NIMH. For many social phobics, preoccupation with what others think may interfere in their job, school, relationships or other social activities.

"Everyday interactions can become very problematic for people with social anxiety disorder," says Heimberg who, as director of Temple University's Adult Anxiety Clinic, helps people change their thought processes in such interactions using cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and medication. The treatment also encourages clients to expose themselves gradually to feared events.

Through his 20-plus years of research, Heimberg has found that nearly everyone fears social situations to some degree. "Some people just think they are shy--that it's a personality trait--and that's just the way they are," says Heimberg. "But...if a person starts fearing many social situations, [and as a result] lives alone or drops out of school, that's not shyness--that's an impairment."

What's more, notes Heimberg, social phobia is generally more debilitating than

phobias focused on singular circumstances, such as a fear of thunderstorms or animals. "If you are afraid of interacting with people, that can mess you up wherever you turn," he says. "It can have very broad mental health implications."

The trouble is, despite the proven efficacy of treatment, many social phobics shy away from it, according to Heimberg's research. For example, he found that 92 percent of people who were accessing information on social phobia on an anxiety clinic Web site met criteria for social anxiety disorder. Yet, only about 36 percent of the respondents reported receiving psychotherapy. But, with CBT treatment or antidepressant medication, about 80 percent of social phobics can alleviate their symptoms, Heimberg says. What's more, clients who receive CBT treatment remain improved five years later, whereas clients who receive only medication treatment are more likely to relapse than clients receiving CBT.

--Prof. Colvin; adapted from "Monitor on Psychology" July/August 2005, a publication of the American Psychological Association.



## ***The Best Deal Around: Join Professional Societies as a Student Member***

Did you know that as an undergraduate you can join professional societies for a discounted membership fee and receive

great benefits, such as journals and important announcements and discussion over the listserve? For example, you can join the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (the main organization for people in this field) for only \$25 a year. You will get subscriptions to two major journals and other advantages!! See me (225 NI, 373-3790) if you want a copy of the application form.

## ***Next Time You Need a Letter of Recommendation...***

As you surely know, letters of recommendation are extremely important in gaining jobs, scholarships, and admission to graduate programs. The *Complete Guide to Graduate School Admissions* states that these letters "are taken very seriously, and sometimes are as important as grades and test scores." The goal is for faculty members to be able to portray their students' capabilities in an honest and compelling manner.

Effective letters are the product of an active developmental partnership between students who request them and faculty who write them. The success of this partnership is determined by the degree to which the following steps have been accomplished:

1. Faculty become aware of the knowledge, skills, and characteristics (or KSCs) that potential employers and graduate school admissions committees value in their applicants.
2. Students are made aware of these KSCs early in their education.
3. Faculty provide students with opportunities to develop these KSCs.
4. Faculty create a system for students to provide information about their KSCs that allows letters to be written in a timely, evidence-based, and procedurally correct manner.

## Which KSCs Are Valued?

Some of the most important KSCs are:

- motivated and hard-working
- high intellectual/scholarly ability
- research skills
- emotionally stable and mature
- writing skills
- speaking skills
- teaching skills, if relevant (or potential)
- potential clinical/counseling skills/  
experience
- works well with others
- deals well with a wide variety of people
- listens well
- takes initiative
- open minded
- has organizational and time management  
skills
- creative and original
- strong knowledge of area of study
- strong character or integrity
- special skills (e.g., computer)
- capable of analytical thought
- broad general knowledge
- intellectually independent
- leadership ability

Identify as letter writers those faculty members who know you best and are likely to have the best opinion of you, and then help them to know where you stand on these (and other relevant) KSCs. This means show them, or tell them about, specific examples of things you have done that demonstrate the KSCs. The more detailed a letter is, the more convincing it is, and the more factual evidence the letter writer can point to, the more effective it will be. Some faculty members ask students to write a statement describing themselves and their relevant experiences, and ask to see the students' resumes, before they write the letter.

## Requesting the Letter

Give your letter writers plenty of time before your deadline and be sure they have all the information they need. This means the relevant forms, a clear statement of what program(s) you are applying for, the deadlines, and any addressed/stamped envelopes that are necessary. Be sure you fill in the relevant portions of each form. All too often, students give a faculty member a blank form and the faculty member does not know what the program is or whether the student has or has not waived the right to see the letter. (In general, letters are more believable if you waive the right to see it.)

Be sure you tell the faculty member whether the letter should be mailed back to you, mailed directly to the school, or held for you to pick up.

And PLAN WELL AHEAD! Many a student realizes too late that despite their wonderful GPA, no professor knows them well enough to write a persuasive letter. There are many ways to get acquainted with faculty so that they feel confident in writing you a strong letter. These include:

- working as their research assistant (for Co-op, for work-study, for directed study, or just as a volunteer)
- doing an honors project with them
- standing out in a small course, for example a lab course or seminar
- going to see the professor to talk about research, graduate school, or course content

--Adapted from the American Psychological Society's *Observer*, May 2005

## 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.

Psychology Faculty often have openings for directed study students. Directed study gives you 4-SH credit as an elective or as a substitute for one of your required lab classes. Check the Psychology Office and notices around the department. Also, approaching faculty often works even if they have not posted a position.

## MAKE \$\$

Prof. Hall is seeking a part-time data entry person. Earn \$8.00/hr. for an estimated 20-40 hrs. Flexible hours in the Psychology Dept. Call 373-3790 or email [hall1@neu.edu](mailto:hall1@neu.edu).

***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!