



Northeastern University

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Psych NUws: The Newsletter of the Northeastern  
University Psychology Department

Department of Psychology

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# *Psych NUws*

## *The Newsletter of the Northeastern University Psychology Department*

Vol. 16, Number 2 (January 2010)

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### *A Message from the Outgoing Chair of the Psychology Department, Prof. Rhea Eskew*

I will be stepping down as Chair of the Psychology Department, effective January 1. My time as Chair has been challenging and fun; I've particularly enjoyed meeting with you, the undergraduate students, so many of whom are doing so many great things. You're doing research, volunteer work, coop, taking classes, being involved in your communities -- all the things we hope that NU students will do. It's been a pleasure working with you.

Prof. Joanne Miller will be taking over the chair duties. Dr. Miller is an internationally known researcher in psycholinguistics, an excellent teacher, and an experienced administrator. She is highly respected within our department and across the University. We could not ask for a better person to lead our department in 2010.

I will be returning to my regular role, teaching and doing research on color vision. Please do stop by my office on the second floor and say hello -- and if you're interested in doing research on color discrimination, by all means let's talk!

### *And, a Message from the New Chair, Prof. Joanne Miller*

This is my first "welcome" to the undergraduate students as I take on the role of department chair this semester. Many of you know me already from the courses I teach in psycholinguistics and statistics, and from working with me in my speech perception lab on the fourth floor. I am taking over from Prof. Rhea Eskew, who has been a superb chair and has done so much to foster the quality of our programs, the opportunities available to undergrads, and the vibrancy of our department.

My goal, like Prof. Eskew's, will be to make your experience as a psychology major as rewarding as possible. I am eager to work with you as we move forward and welcome your input, ideas, and suggestions - my email address is [j.miller@neu.edu](mailto:j.miller@neu.edu). I wish you a very productive and rewarding semester.

### *Good-Bye to Rhonda Johnson!*

Rhonda Johnson, a highly valued member of the Psychology Department Office Staff, is leaving as of January to pursue a career in elementary teaching. Her experience in helping, teaching,

managing, guiding, cajoling, and sometimes scolding 700 majors and the other characters in our department (a.k.a. grad students and faculty) will surely make teaching fourth graders seem like a piece of cake! Best to you in your new career, Rhonda!

## ***Update on College Restructuring***

As you probably know, the College of Arts and Sciences will be splitting into three separate colleges on July 1, 2010. Psychology will be in the College of Science. The two other new colleges are the College of Social Science and Humanities, which will include Criminal Justice, and the College of Arts, Media, and Design. How will the restructuring affect Psychology undergrads? Basically, not at all! For example, the move to the new college will NOT change any of the following:

- Psychology Department faculty or staff
- Psychology major or minor requirements
- NU Core requirements
- Psychology dual majors
- Psychology course offerings
- Coop opportunities
- Research opportunities
- Resources such as the Psychology Club
- Preparation for a variety of careers

And, we will not be physically moving. The Psychology Department office will still be 125 NI, where you can find our terrific office staff, Yvonne, Maribel, Rhonda, and Gwyn. As always, they will be eager to help you with questions about courses, registration, advisors, etc. If you have any questions about the college restructuring, please feel free to contact me at [j.miller@neu.edu](mailto:j.miller@neu.edu).

--Prof. Miller

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

A very important function of *Psych NUws* is to help our current undergrads see into the crystal ball of the future. For this purpose we ask recent (sometimes not so recent) grads to tell us what they are doing and how they got there. Sometimes they have happy stories, and sometimes the stories are mixed, but always there is something to learn.

**Katie Phillips, '09** I am getting my MA in Psychology at San Diego State with an emphasis in Developmental, and so far I am really enjoying it. I work in Dr. Margaret Friend's lab in child language development and am just finishing up my lit review for my thesis. I'll be looking at maternal responsivity as a predictor of communicative development in 4-5 year olds. I haven't gotten to do a ton of work in the lab yet, but that is going to change next semester.

I also work as a TA for three sections (1500 students!), but the job pays well and it allows me to make close relationships with more faculty in the department, which is very helpful. The grad students all work 10 hours per week in the lab, and then most of us have 20 hours per week of paid TA/RA jobs. It is very busy, but I am thriving on it!

I am really happy that I chose a master's program. There is so much I didn't know about the field of psychology, academically and professionally. Even just three months in I have a great understanding of where I do and do not want to take my career. I have already been able to "dip" into different areas of psychology and think about what is best for me.

I plan to get my Ph.D. next, like many students in my program, and it's comforting to know that I will have experience, confidence, and discipline to handle the workload that will be expected of me in a doctoral program. SDSU has a small, research-based graduate department, so it's

been easy to build relationships and get all the help I need to do well in such a demanding program.

**Sigrid Scherpriet, '08** I chose a master's program in neural and behavioral sciences in Tübingen, Germany. Honestly, the program is very tough. I did expect it to be challenging, but I have not thought it will be this hard. Most courses include a lot of detail, for example Neurophysiology or cellular and molecular biology. There is also a lot of math and computational subjects. At the end of February I will start my first laboratory rotation to get some practical experiences. Most likely I will work in a neuropsychology lab.

**Tyler Rubin, '09** First off, life is GREAT! I live in Somerville and couldn't be happier AND I have one of the best/hardest jobs in town! I work for Germaine Lawrence Inc. in Arlington. It's a huge residential treatment center/campus funded by the great state of Massachusetts. I am a residential counselor and I work with behavioral, sexually explicit, psychotic (some, not all) teenage girls. It's extremely rewarding and exhausting all at once. BUT, I don't think I'd have it any other way...I really feel like I'm earning my way and actually making a difference.

**Vanessa Baldini, '09** I'm in a master's program at NYU, in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)...which is equivalent to Applied Linguistics. My classes are in full swing. On top of my classes, two mornings a week, I observe a classroom in Chinatown. Plus I have two jobs, one is only on Saturdays, and I am the program coordinator for a non-profit organization that provides free math tutoring for inner city children. The other is as a reading interventionist, through a study called INSIGHTS that 3 professors at NYU have been working on. It's a huge study with over \$8 million worth of funding. The study investigates the temperament of children and the effects on their learning, and the control group is a reading intervention,

which is where I come in....so I'm applying some of what I've learned at NU!

**Naa-Solo Tettey, '03** Naa-Solo was in our Honors Program and has since been thriving in New York City, where she earned two master's degrees at Columbia University—one in counseling psychology and one in clinical psychology. She did an internship at St. Luke's Hospital Obesity Research Clinic and then got a master's in public health! Her current interests are in disease management and workplace wellness, and she is now starting a doctorate in public health at Columbia University.

**Hilary Ziegner, '05** Immediately following my NU graduation, I was hired as a Mental Health Specialist on the Short Term Unit (STU) at McLean Hospital. The STU is an inpatient unit with patients primarily diagnosed with mood disorders, bipolar spectrum disorders, and/or personality disorders. The co-morbidity rate is high, and patients are often also struggling with things such as anxiety disorders, substance abuse, eating disorders, or OCD. Additionally, almost every patient has either been contemplating suicide or has actually attempted it prior to admission. This setting, while admittedly intense, has been an excellent environment in which to both garner and practice a wide array of clinical skills. While it has certainly been possible for me to grow and advance in my roles, I have found that I've reached the limits of what my undergraduate degree clinically qualifies me to do and I certainly can't foresee living on my current salary as a long-term option.

That being said, I have always anticipated graduate education as an important and necessary step in advancing my career and I am happy to be embarking on that next step. This fall I began the NU Direct-Entry Nursing Program to become a Nurse Practitioner. I feel it's an excellent way to advance professionally and clinically without losing contact with the actual

client. I plan to take advantage of the dual degree option to earn licensure as both an Adult Psychiatric NP and an Adult Primary Care NP. The dual option is compelling to me as I enjoy working with people on all aspects of health, I highly value professional competence, and I want to be in the position to embrace the move towards integrative healthcare models. I am quite excited about these next steps.

**Andrea Sparko, '06** I graduated from Northeastern with an interest in social psychology. During my last semester at NU, I took a part-time position in the Human Factors Division at the U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe Center in Cambridge, MA. I continued full-time at the Volpe Center following graduation. I have been at Volpe for over three years now, investigating flight simulator requirements for the training of airline pilots.

One of my main research projects involves flight simulator motion requirements, for which I am currently comparing the workload and performance of pilots trained in a full-motion simulator to those trained in a reduced-motion simulator. For this project and others, I have assisted or been in charge of many aspects of the research process, including: conducting literature reviews on flight simulator requirements and visual and vestibular motion perception, participating in study design, overseeing data collection, conducting extensive data analyses, co-authoring published conference papers, and traveling for conferences to help present published works.

In August of 2008, I enrolled in the Masters degree program at the Brandeis University Psychology Department. My thesis project is investigating the impact of both facial structure and emotional expression on first impressions of personality traits, and comparing these impressions in static (photographs) and dynamic (moving/videos) faces. I continue to

work at the Volpe Center as I pursue my degree, as a participant in the Volpe Fellows Program, which pays for my tuition and other school-related expenses. I am interested in incorporating some aspects of social psychology into my work at the Volpe Center. In the future, I plan to apply to PhD programs, with an emphasis in social psychology, particularly nonverbal aspects.

**Jacquelyn Conace, '08** When I graduated it was a bittersweet time. My five years there had flown by so quickly, but I knew that I had gained invaluable experience from my three co-ops. Before I had even graduated I had gotten a job at Genzyme as a Clinical Research Coordinator. If not for Northeastern's co-op program, I wouldn't have known about the field of Clinical Research at all. Unfortunately, after six months at Genzyme I realized that I was overqualified for the position and had to start the job search again. At the same time, a full-time Clinical Research Associate position opened up at my previous co-op employer, Aspect Medical Systems. I got the position and have been working at Aspect since last October. This job allows me to travel to various hospitals throughout the country to do research. I plan to take the GRE at the beginning of 2010 and pursue a master's degree in Clinical Psychology.

## ***Alumni Gifts Support Research Fellowships for Our Undergrads***

Thanks to the generosity of Psychology alumni, the Department is pleased to announce the establishment of a fund to support Psychology Undergraduate Research Fellowships. These fellowships will offer our students the opportunity to work in a faculty member's lab part-time at the same time they attend school. In many cases, these fellowships will allow students to extend the work that they began as directed studies in particular labs. This kind of research experience is just what graduate programs are

looking for, not only in those programs that are research-oriented, but also in clinical and counseling programs. In November, Psychology faculty were offered the opportunity to nominate students for these awards, and we received a number of worthy applications. We were able to award fellowships to two students for the spring semester: Yui Anzai and David A. Lynch.

Yui Anzai, a senior, is working on a project in Dr. Coley's lab. The project involves looking at how people generate inductive inferences. For example, if you learn that *lions and zebras have disease X*, what else do you think might have disease X, and why? In particular, the research will focus on how relations among premise categories, and the property being projected, influence the kinds of inferences that people generate. For example, data have been collected on how participants generate inferences from a range of single animals and pairs of animals. The relationships between the pairs and the property being projected are manipulated, and participants provide responses, which are then coded by trained teams.

David Lynch, also a senior, is working with Dr. Reeves on research on depth perception – how we see in 3-D, even though the retinae of our eyes act as flat (2-D) surfaces. Bishop Berkeley (1709) explained this by perceptual learning in infancy. David is looking for such learning in adulthood, using stereoscopic displays of numerous tiny crosses whose depth signatures are randomized spatially, so that unlike (say) a stereo 3-D movie, there are no coherent forms. With hours of training, adults can learn to see up to 8 distinct depth planes, though they have never seen such stimuli before and for the first hour can only distinguish 3 such planes. This learning is mental, not physical, because (unlike the 'Magic Eye') optics are used to ensure the eyes are appropriately focused and aligned.

--Prof. Harkins

## ***A Psychology Master's Program that Offers Full Funding? Yes, They Exist!!***

Recently *Psych NUws* discovered a treasure trove of listings of universities that offer master's programs with money attached! Undoubtedly, there are many others too. Getting a master's degree is a fantastic stepping stone into a PhD program, and also gives students with undecided interests a chance to figure out exactly what they want to pursue within psychology.

At the **University of Northern Iowa**, there is an MA with a social psychology emphasis, and typically all the students receive at least either a 10 hr/week assistantship or a 1/2 tuition waiver. Some students receive up to a 20 hr/week assistantship AND full tuition waiver--depends on which openings they apply for, whether they are chosen, etc. There is also full support for some minority students who qualify. The website is [www.uni.edu/psych](http://www.uni.edu/psych).

Most programs in **Canada** (if your student is willing to move out of country) are still doing separate MA and PhD programs, and typically offer funding at the Master's level. Queen's, for example, gives their Master's students \$15,000 per year including a TAship. Although there is no tuition waiver and International tuition is somewhat higher, this will help reduce the costs of living expenses, etc. In addition, it's possible to find some paying research assistant positions, etc.

The **University of Dayton** offers an MA in general psychology and students who apply before a specific deadline can be considered for a graduate assistantship (which comes with a full tuition waiver and a stipend). Typically they accept approximately 12 new students each year and 6 or so receive graduate assistantships, which were almost always renewed for the

second year. Students can pursue a concentration, such as social psychology.

At **Western Illinois University** there is an MS program in experimental psychology, with various specialization areas within that. It offers full tuition waivers and assistantships for the top first-year students; however, all of the students (both first and second year) usually get assistantships either in the department or in other offices across campus.

If the student is considering master's programs outside of the US, the **Dutch** government provides generous support to talented students through the Huygens scholarship program. You can find more information about the program and funding on [www.ru.nl/master/behaviouralscience](http://www.ru.nl/master/behaviouralscience).

**Western Kentucky University** provides stipends of about \$1000 per month during the school year to the Experimental/Social Master's students. Any applicant will know whether he/she is going to have funding before the acceptance deadline. The cost of living in Bowling Green is lower than a lot of places, which makes the stipend livable.

The **Wake Forest** MA program in experimental psychology is excellent for preparation for a PhD program or other career tracks. Students are fully funded during the academic year, although the stipend has been at the low end.

**Idaho State University** has an experimental MS program. It is a broad program in that students take classes across the core areas of psychology, and any specialization they would get would come from the advisor they work with and the thesis topic they choose. There are typically two graduate teaching assistant positions reserved for the students in this program. The GTAship covers tuition and comes with a small stipend. You could also look at the webpage at <http://www.isu.edu/departments/psych/>.

**Ball State University** has an MA program in cognitive and social processes (and also an MA in clinical) and provides assistantship support to 10 students per year (out of the combined cog/soc and clinical programs). Here's the link for the cog/soc program:

<http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/CollegesandDepartments/GradSchool/Academics/ProgramsofStudy/MastersDegrees/CognitiveandSocialProcesses.aspx>

**Towson University** has an MA program in experimental psychology that allows students to specialize in social psychology, among other areas. Over 50% of the full-time students are funded via GA or TA positions. Here's a link to the program site:

<http://grad.towson.edu/program/master/psyc-expy-ma/>

**Georgia Southern** has a general experimental MS program that offers two students in each cohort (usually 10 students maximum) a stipend and tuition remission. About 80% of their master's students are accepted into PhD programs. The others have been very successful finding applied research positions or teaching at community colleges.

**Western Washington University** offers a terminal MS degree in experimental psychology. Students can conduct research and take coursework in many areas. Students are eligible for teaching assistantships that provide tuition reimbursement and a stipend. The best qualified students typically receive two academic quarters of TA support in their first year (out of three quarters) and two or three in their second year. Other sources of funding are also available, including some research assistantships and need-based financial aid programs that include grants, loans, and work-study. Here is some more information about the program:

<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~psych/>

Other schools that are said to offer funding: **College of William and Mary, San Diego State University, Illinois State University, Villanova University, Indiana State University, Connecticut College, Smith College.** There are probably many others, too.

## ***False Confessions: Why Would Anyone Make One?***

Remarkably, many instances have been documented of people who make false confessions to crimes. These include horrifying crimes such as rape and murder. How can this bizarre behavior be explained? Studying this phenomenon brings together social, cognitive, personality, and abnormal psychologists.

Here are some of the reasons, some of which defy rationality but can make (perhaps twisted) sense psychologically:

--A chance at fame, especially when the crime is highly reported. More than 200 people confessed to kidnapping Charles Lindbergh's baby.

--The suspect gives up his/her Miranda right to remain silent too soon. Innocent suspects give up their rights more often than guilty ones, and once the suspect starts a dialogue with interrogators, bad things can happen.

--Interrogators are clever at making the suspect think that confessing is better than denying (such as promises of leniency and threats of various kinds).

--Sometimes, the accused comes to believe he/she is actually guilty. Memory is quite malleable and interrogators can plant misleading 'memories' in the mind of the accused.

Because cases with confessions have a high conviction rate, once the suspect goes down this path, it's likely too late to be reversed. Studies of juries show that jurors are likely to convict after a confession even if they know it was coerced and even if they deny being influenced by the existence of a confession.

In most states, there is no law requiring the videotaping of interrogations, so it is very hard to know how a confession came about. Psychologists, led by Saul Kassin at Williams College, are trying to make interrogations more transparent.

--Summarized from *APS Observer*, 12/09

## ***What Can a Mouse Do for Psychology?***

The mouse is the mammal currently most widely used in basic biological sciences for the experimental investigation of organ function, including brain function. Students often wonder whether mice are also important to human psychology. If they are, isn't their importance limited given the very small size of the mouse's brain and the total absence of any of the mental abilities that humans possess? True. But it is also true that the genomic proximity of mice to humans is surprisingly close; between the two species there is 70 - 90% genetic similarity.

We, psychologists, are interested in sensory processes, emotions, learning, memory, etc. in humans. We know that animals are capable of perceiving environmental stimuli, expressing emotions, processing and storing new information, etc. To perform these behaviors, animals, like humans, employ networks of neurons that extend from the sensory organs to lower and higher structures of the brain. As humans evolved, complicated neuronal circuits for sensory and behavioral functions formed in

the brain and these are now incorporated in our genetic make up.

There is strong evidence that genetically encoded fundamental plans for the organization and function of sensory and behavioral systems are essentially the same in all mammals. From my own experiences, I can tell you that elementary night vision capabilities of humans and mice measured behaviorally are strikingly similar and, as I learn from molecular biologists, so are the genes that encode for this function. Access to the genes of mice afforded by modern biotechnology provides us with great opportunities to understand the molecular basis of elementary behaviors in humans.

Richard Axel, an MD and research biologist at NYU, and Linda Buck, an immunologist (with a BS in Psychology) at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Seattle, discovered that in rodents about 1000 genes (3% of the mouse genome) encode for the large number of odors that rodents can smell. Among the newly discovered genes were several that encode for the neural connections between the olfactory (smell) system and regions in the brain that process emotions and memory. Some olfactory genes are turned on in social interactions. In humans, about 350 genes (more than 1% of the genome) encode for about 10,000 odors that we can smell.

It is hypothesized that several of the human olfactory genes may play a role in emotion and memory. Today, the complex connections between the olfactory system and various brain regions of normal and genetically engineered mutant mice are intensely studied with the goal to understand elementary behaviors in humans at the molecular level. Drs. Axel and Buck received the Nobel Prize in 2004 for their work on olfaction.

Work on mice is not likely to yield insight in human thought, complex emotions, social life, and perceptions. However, mice brains are

endowed with interacting electro-chemical microcircuits that process information and adapt to the outside world. These circuitries will inevitably be dissembled and re-assembled using molecular biological tools, and used in combination with mouse behavioral experimentation we may someday know the rules by which a stimulus in the outside world becomes a percept, an emotion, or a memory. That's what a mouse can do for psychology.

--Prof. Naarendorp

## ***Doctoral Program in Organizational Behavior Seeks Applicants***

At the University of Utah's program in Organizational Behavior, students and faculty pursue the social psychology of organizational life, with focus on topics such as ethical decision making, prejudice at work, negotiations, workplace justice, self-defeating organizational behaviors, and the display of sexuality at work. The hiring market for people with such a doctorate is excellent, with starting salaries commonly exceeding \$120,000 per year! Students in the Utah program receive tuition remission, a stipend, health insurance, and a research expense account. For more information contact [www.business.utah.edu](http://www.business.utah.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.

