The hospitality room is the traditional center of visiting day - a place for prospective grads to hang out and feel the love.

A lot of work goes into getting it set up.

But after all the hard work, the room ends up looking very attractive!
Of course, the prospective grad students had a lot of meetings, so they couldn’t be there to have tasty snacks all the time. Fortunately, a number of people were willing to help them out!

The atmosphere in the hospitality room was so comfortable that Bryan almost took a nap.*

*if you want flattering pictures in the PLB, you shouldn’t make fun of the editor when he’s working out
Students currently taking the developmental core know that Piaget is one of the most famous developmental psychologists. But what they may not know is that the name Piaget is widely known, even to people who don’t study psychology, as the picture below indicates:

Apparently the hands tell you it’s Assimilation O’Clock, or half past Accomodation.

If Assimilation and Accomodation really are Batman and Robin, you know they’d be carrying a watch like this in their utility belts!

This month’s PLB Shout-Out goes to Marlene and David, for hosting the grad recruiting party at the spacious and well-appointed Chateau de la Plaut-Behrmann.

If you weren’t there, you missed out on some excellent food, company, and piano and Guitar Hero playing.

Here’s hoping it leads to a good yield of graduate students!

(For pictures, see Page 12)
The PLB was recently alerted by longtime reader (but first-time caller) Miriam Rosenberg-Lee that Mike Tomlin was named the Sexiest NFL Head Coach by Maxim. The PLB rushed to the nearest newstand to buy an issue. Sadly, however, Mike Tomlin seems to be the only Pittsburgh icon rated for his/her/its sexiness, which disappointed the PLB. For example, I really thought that they might have had a category for Sexiest Psychological Bulletin Editor, and I think that the results would have been favorable.

Perhaps it’s for the best, though. Once that door is open, and Maxim starts rating various members of the Psychology department, it could get pretty unpleasant. There are some tough choices that no one should be forced to make.
It has come to the PLB’s attention that there is a club for scientists with long, flowing hair: the Luxuriant Flowing Hair Club for Scientists. (That’s a link to the LFHCfS. Click it!).

How does one earn membership in this club? First, of course, you need to have long, flowing, hair. And be a scientist. Like these guys.

But the second thing you need is a nomination. Could there be someone among us who is deserving? Someone whose hair is almost as good as their science?

Hint: his hair is wavy... which rhymes with his name. No, the answer is not “gravy.”

PLB Shout-Out

Yes, we’re having another one! This one goes out to Erin Donahoe and Dav-ey Rakison, who both worked hard to make sure that the grad student recruiting weekend went off without a hitch. Putting together the schedule, alone, is the kind of jigsaw puzzle I wouldn’t want any part of. And then you’ve got to actually talk with the grad students, and make sure they don’t get lost. It’s a lot of work! Thanks, guys.
Michael Scheier apparently has talents beyond his brilliant administrative abilities. Michael (along with his life time collaborator Charles Carver) was chosen as the winner of the prestigious Campbell Award by the Society of Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP). The Campbell Award is given for outstanding life-time contributions to Social Psychology. Scheier and Carver (duet) gave a lecture associated with the award at the annual meeting of SPSP in Albuquerque in February. The lecture focused on their 30+ years of work in self-regulation, but also provided advice to young investigators about how to develop their careers. The lecture was met with tremendous enthusiasm by the packed auditorium. A knowledgeable scientist interviewed after the talk suggested that Scheier and Carver’s theory has had an enormous impact on the field, even though the theory is more complicated than the phenomena themselves.

-Submitted by Sheldon Cohen

Sheldon Cohen to appear on your TV
WQED: Thursday, March 27th, 10 PM

“Unnatural Causes” is a 4 part PBS special on the effects of social economic status on health and well-being. It is an extremely well done science based program that already has been adopted in dozens of public health schools as an educational tool. The first program, aired on Thursday, March 27th on WQED TV at 10PM includes a feature on Sheldon Cohen’s work on early childhood SES and adult health (during 2nd half hour). It is rumored that Dr. Cohen was chosen for his good looks and Pittsburgh connections.
March’s Graduate Student of the Month is Erika Taylor. Erika and I talked about a wide variety of topics, including butter sculptures, Mexican food, speech perception, and the distinction between humans and animals. Sound interesting?

PLB: Tell us a bit about your past.
ET: I grew up in Florida, and moved to Carnegie Mellon for my undergrad, and did a Cognitive Science degree. Although I didn’t start with that as my major; I didn’t even know that they had that as a major when I began. When I graduated, I went to work with Marcel for two and a half years. Then I got married, and took a little time off. That was really boring, though, and I looked for good jobs, and found a position with Chuck Perfetti at Pitt, in his Reading and Language Lab. I became his behavioral lab manager, and partway through I also started being in charge of his ERP lab. But I always wanted to go to grad school, and I felt like it was finally time, so I applied to grad school.

PLB: What kind of research are you doing?
ET: I’m interested in looking at that period of time between when a stimulus enters a perceptual system, and the point where we have a conscious perception. Speech perception research is interesting in this regard, because a lot of information is going in, and there’s all this noise and variability, but somehow, in the end, there’s a discrete and obvious perception. It’s also interesting because it’s a unidimensional input: the speech signal exists, and then it’s gone, so you have to take all the input in, and keep track of it. I’m interested in using MEG and ERP because it can give you great data on the time course of brain response.

PLB: What is your first year project about?
ET: My first year project looks at the neural basis of speech perception, and looking at a particular aspect of the MEG signal – the M100 – and seeing how it relates to speech categories, and context effects. Something about the M100 reflects the category that the listener knows the speech sound responds to. We want to see if it can be manipulated by context. We present a sequence of tones providing a context of a certain mean frequency, and looking at people’s identifications of vowels /u/ and /a/ and an ambiguous sound between them. We’re not just looking at what the M100 does when you hear these particular speech sounds, but also, in the M100, do we see context effects? We know behaviorally it happens, but when does it happen? Does it happen during initial feature processing, or is it something that occurs later, like a top down process?

PLB: What do you do in your spare time?
ET: What? When would that be? Well, occasionally, I do have some spare time. I have lots of things that I do. Like make costumes at Halloween. At Easter I make a butter lamb, where I make a lamb-shaped thing out of butter. It’s getting better every year. It started out looking like a dog.

PLB: How much butter does that take? Is it life-sized?
ET: No, no, it’s little, like a stick and a half of butter. It’s kind of a family tradition. Or at least I thought it was. But then my parents told me that everyone in the family hates making butter lambs. So now it’s just a me tradition.

PLB: Other than butter carving, what else do you do for fun?
ET: I like to take pictures. I’m trying to get a macro lens and a long distance lens so I can take more pictures. I play the musical saw. That’s my instrument of choice.
PLB: Does that differ from the non-musical saw?
ET: It’s a normal saw, that’s very bendy. And you bend it in an S-shape, and then run a bow across the side that’s not sharp. I bought the sharpest saw at Home Depot I could find, so I can also saw with it. But now my brother bought me an actual musical saw, that’s just for the purpose of music. So I don’t cut myself as much.

PLB: So, in addition to sawing and butter, do you have any other hobbies?
ET: I have an affinity for food, so I write restaurant reviews on Tastyburgher.com (link). I haven’t done any since I started grad school, but I should be updating soon. Because Taco Loco has moved locations, and now they have beer. Have you ever tried their Agua Fresca? Their watermelon flavor: it’s like sticking a straw into a watermelon. It tastes even like the rind, and the seed. The whole watermelon is in that flavor.

PLB: OK. Now is the time for the Three Tough Questions. First of all, what, for you, is the big question you want to answer with your research?
ET: Arrgh. I hate this question. Ummmm... OK. Well. I’m really interested in the difference between animals and humans. How much of what we do is grounded in the evolution of the brain from mechanisms that are present in animal ancestors? That’s one of the reasons I find communication intriguing, because lots of animals communicate, but the way humans do it seems to be different, more formal, complicated way.

PLB: If you couldn’t have an academic career, what would you want to do with your life?
ET: I was going to say that I would be studying dolphin cognition, but that’s probably an academic career. So I guess I’ll say a wildlife photographer. So I can be out there in the wilderness, observing animals do their regular thing. I love waiting silently for hours for an animal to show up, and be itself, and not know that I’m there. So probably a wildlife photographer, if anyone would hire me to do that.

PLB: Finally, the third tough question is especially appropriate for a food reviewer. Gordita, or chalupa?
ET: Do you mean, a gordita and chalupa from Taco Bell, or from a real Mexican restaurant?

PLB: I don’t know the answer to that question*. Did gorditas and chalupas exist before Taco Bell discovered them?
ET: I’ve never had a gordita from an actual Mexican restaurant. But I’ve seen chalupas. La Fiesta has a chalupa. But let’s just go with Taco Bell. The answer is: chalupa.

PLB: That is correct! The gordita and chalupa are identical, except that the chalupa is fried.

* Monty Python fans: rejoice!
CMU Strategic Plan: IT
Every 10 years, CMU writes a new Strategic Plan to list goals it wants to achieve over the next decade. Goals for improving university-wide information technology (IT) are a subsection of the plan. At our Feb. meeting, we watched a PowerPoint presentation about the proposed recommendations. Neither the presentation nor a 3-page document (Download link) contained specific recommendations; rather, they listed general aims like efficiency, determining which processes are better to centralize vs decentralize, making the IT experience better for students, etc.

SC Elections Changes
The elections system for Staff Council is changing this spring. Starting in mid-March or so, you’ll receive printed info about changes in how SC reps are elected. To find out more right now, visit our website (URL below).

Proposed Constitution Change
We discussed a proposed amendment to our Constitution which attempts to establish a formal procedure (e.g., hearings, voting) for dismissing SC members who’ve shown “neglect of duty, misconduct, or any action deemed detrimental to [SC]”. A vote on whether to amend the Constitution was postponed until the Constitution Committee adjusts the wording to address concerns raised during discussion.

Desperate Call for Volunteers
If you like working with kids, please consider volunteering for Take Our Daughters & Sons to Workday (TODASW). SC would really benefit from your help. Send email to my friendly fellow SC rep Audrey Portis at aportis@andrew.cmu.edu and she’ll let you tell you what you can do during this popular April event. In other TODASW news, there won’t be any organized athletic events this year. Emphasis will instead be placed on activities held in the workplace environment (office, classroom, etc.).

CMU-Qatar
SC VP Jen Cox recently traveled to CMU-Qatar to meet with our Qatar SC rep, HR and other university officials, and others. Jen took many photos on her trip, and created a terrific PowerPoint presentation (Download link). One of the more interesting things she had to say was that in Qatar, if you want to get your car fixed, you drive to one street where there is a long line of car-repair places, all owned and operated by a different family. You select your car repair place based on whether your extended family owns it (not, apparently, on who does a better job fixing cars). The same procedure applies when you want to get other stuff serviced or fixed, buy produce, etc. Also, FYI, people eat baby camels in Qatar. Wow.

President’s Open Forum: Saudi Arabia
Most of the Forum was devoted to a description of, and audience feedback about, a recent opportunity for CMU to become involved in Saudi Arabia’s new graduate-level research university, KAUST (King Abdullah Univ. of Science & Technology). Proposals were invited from a number of schools, CMU being one of them, and the winner isn’t decided yet. It involves a physical presence (offices) in both the US and Saudi Arabia; faculty/students would regularly travel to Saudi Arabia to collaborate over there. Dr. Cohon’s 3 stated reasons for applying for it are:
(see next page)

[Editor’s note: It’s careful editing like this that allows me to build suspense. Not just sloppily cutting off articles in mid-sentence for no apparent reason. Our editorial standards are
(1.) The money and the opportunity it presents to improve Arab education;
(2.) Potential for an independent board, e.g., control over some decisionmaking; and
(3.) Potential to influence Saudi culture. Faculty in the audience, including Clark Glymour (Philosophy) pointed out that it’s controversial whether we should be involved at all in such an endeavor, since Saudi culture is quite different from American culture (rights of women, gays, those of Jewish faith and/or Israeli citizenship, etc.). Faculty also said it is much more dangerous for them to travel to S.A. than Qatar, even though the KAUST facility will be deliberately located in an isolated, remote geographic location. Relatedly, someone asked, How are we going to shape the culture if it’ll be an isolated fortress? Faculty requested that CMU release its risk assessment/risk analysis reports so they can make an informed decision about whether to support the proposal. Faculty also expressed the concern that CMU doesn’t receive enough money from the Qatar Foundation to cover expenses, inflation etc.; Would the same thing happen with Saudi Arabia?

There was a live videolink to our Qatar rep and a few Qatar staff during the event. One of the most memorable moments was when a male Qatar staff member, clothed in traditional Gulf Arab dress (a long white gown, which Google tells me is called a dishdashah) approached the microphone and said he wanted to comment about the Saudi Arabia discussion. He passionately agreed with one of the 3 goals for pursuing the KAUST project (enhancing the level of educational opportunities available for Arabs), but then politely said, in effect, “We don’t need anybody coming here to change our culture; we’re happy with it as is”.

Other Issues Raised at Open Forum
--Tuition too high (a perennial comment at Forums)
--Why isn’t there an Arabic language major here? (Answer: Money. “It’s coming”)
--Comments about CMU-Pgh. green practices & carbon emissions efforts
--Qn. about status of Middle States Accreditation process. Campuswide info sessions going on now.
--Question from older faculty: Why don’t TIAA-CREF & Vanguard have any non-dollar denominated investment vehicles, since the US dollar is going down the toilet and taking our retirement investments with it?
--Qn. about faculty salary annual raises. Answer: “Above 2%. Not decided yet”
--Comment from student: CMU doesn’t listen to / act on student feedback in certain departments or with respect to certain facilities heavily used by undergrads.
--Comment that after Kerry, Edwards, Michael Moore visited campus in recent years, Republicans want equal time for their own speakers.

Upcoming Staff Council Events

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For more on Staff Council, visit [http://www.cmu.edu/staff-council](http://www.cmu.edu/staff-council)
The food was excellent. Continuing a theme of recruiting weekend: visiting grad students as an excuse to eat!

It seemed like everyone had a good time!