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Meeting of the Minds Competition

If you’re working with an undergraduate who has done independent research in your lab, encourage them to present at the Meeting of the Minds (Wednesday, May 9th). In particular, the psychology department gives an award to the best psychological research project. Students must choose to enter the competition, though! They can select the option to join the competition when they register for Meeting of the Minds. The registration deadline is this Wednesday, April 4th.

Psi Chi: A New Beginning!

This January, Carnegie Mellon University’s Psi Chi chapter, founded May 13th, 1975, inducted its new members and elected officers for the spring semester with much pizza and cookies to mark the occasion. The new officers include: Katie Andreassen (President), Jen Fillo (Vice-President), Gabe Smith (Treasurer), and Will Eimer (Secretary). The chapter started the year planning activities, fundraising, and the spring induction.

On Saturday, March 21st, Jen Fillo and Gabe Smith kicked off the year’s activities by attending the 1st Annual Duquesne University Regional Undergraduate Psychology Conference. They presented their poster entitled “Influence of Female Stature on Blame and Punishment Decisions” based on a study they did for Research Method’s in Social Psychology last fall. They represented CMU well, only slightly scaring the Duquesne students, by presenting a real study instead of a theoretical paper. They could see the confusion in the audiences eyes when they said such things as “factor analysis” and “simultaneous multiple regression.” There are rumors circulating that one audience member fainted at the sight of their table. Hopefully, next year more psychology students will be able to attend.

Some upcoming activities include a bake sale, t-shirt sale, and new member induction. The chapter will be holding a bake sale on April 12th outside Doherty hall. Come out, buy a cookie, and support their efforts. Additionally, the chapter will be selling plaid brain t-shirts. At the low low cost of only $10, you too can sport the Psychology Department’s plaid brain. Contact Psi Chi president Katie Andreassen (kandreas@andrew) to order yours today. The chapter will be adding to Psi Chi’s over 500,000 national members during their spring induction. It will be held on Tuesday, April 24, 2007 from 6 to 8pm in the Tepper Grand Room. All faculty are welcome to attend.

Despite all of these amazing activities, the chapter is most excited about their participation in booth. This year’s Carnival theme, “Small Things Made Big,” presented an opportunity that could not be passed up. Officers and members alike are working hard on plans for the Psi Chi giant Skinner box booth. They are already collecting large quantities of wood and chicken wire. The assistance of anyone with electrical experience would be much appreciated. While the membership is excited for the project, they lack the electrical experience to make the food lever work.
Above: The spring leadership of Psi Chi, gazing boldly into the future. From left to right - Jen Fillo, Gabe Smith, Will Eimer, and Katie Andreassen. Below: The members of Psi Chi.
Hollywood types everywhere (well, mostly in Hollywood) are making loads of cash from remaking 80s TV shows (Dukes of Hazzard, Starsky and Hutch, etc). If the PLB were in charge of Hollywood, here’s how we’d remake some classics on...

**Punky Brookster**

**Synopsis:** Sassy youngster Brooke Feeney and her puppy are adopted by cantankerous older man, played by Sheldon Cohen. Over the course of the series, Brookster teaches Sheldon to enjoy life, while Sheldon teaches Punky how to avoid colds through the power of positive attitude.

**Very special episode:** Punky Brookster gets trapped in an abandoned refrigerator at a junkyard, but her puppy finds help. She learns an important lesson about playing in major appliances.

**Perfect (Developmental) Strangers**

**Synopsis:** Cousin Davey leaves his homeland, a simple island nation, to come to America and live with cousin Erik in a major US city. Davey is enthusiastic and naive, while Erik is cynical and uptight: they’re the original odd couple! But somehow, the two of them learn to live together and appreciate each other.

Each episode centers around how Davey, raised in a remote island nation, is a fish out of water in the big city. He frequently misunderstands American culture, leading to slightly hilarious results!

**Running gags:** Each episode, Davey tries to get Erik to sample some of the cuisine of his island homeland. Erik takes one bite, turns green, and runs offscreen.

In addition, Erik and Davey celebrate good fortune with the “Dance of Joy,” a traditional dance in Davey’s homeland (seen at the left).
Bob Siedler plays a distinguished older gentleman who spends lots of time in Atlanta. Each episode, one of his friends gets accused of murder (over the course of series, basically everyone Bob knows will be accused, so there will be plenty of guest spots available!).

Each week, Bob investigates the crime, and, during a climactic cross-examination, makes the REAL criminal confess thanks to his extensive knowledge of wine.

Every episode ends something like this...

**Bob:** Now, I’m not a real lawyer. I may not have a fancy law degree. But I DO know something about wine.

**Prosecutor:** Objection, your honor! Relevance!

**Bob:** If you’ll give me just a minute, your honor, we’ll all see how this is relevant.

**Judge:** All right, Bob. I’m giving you a little leeway. But make it fast!

**Bob:** Thank you, your honor. As I was saying, I do know a little something about wine. Now, correct me if I’m wrong, but you testified that you couldn’t have committed the murder, because you were passed out drunk that night. Is that right?

**Witness:** Y-yes, that’s right.

**Bob:** In fact, if I remember a-right, you said you had been drinking SOOO much wine, that you passed out. In fact, you drank an entire bottle of 2002 Beringer Chenin Blanc, is that correct?

**Witness:** R-right, that’s what I said.

**Bob:** I have here, in my hand, a GLASS of Beringer’s Chenin Blanc from 2002. A very good year. I’d just like you to finish this glass.

**Witness:** OK.

**Bob:** Good, good. There you go. Drink deeply. Enjoy the full-bodied flavor...

**Witness:** [Spits out the wine]

**Bob:** Ah-ha! You see, Judge? No one could drink this wine! It’s swill! Robert Parker gave it a rating of 71. It tastes like Satan urinated in the bottle after eating a pound of asparagus! There is simply NO way this man could have consumed enough of this wine to get drunk. It’s undrinkable.

**Witness:** All right! All right, I admit it. I did it. Just don’t make me drink any more of that stuff.

**Bob:** Now, I’m no fancy lawyer. Just a simple developmental psychologist, but I do know that in prison, the wine is even worse. Bailiff -- take this man into custody.

**Witness:** NooOOOOOooooOoooooo!
These are the highlights of President Jerry Cohon’s address to the Faculty Senate

**Budget Deficit**
The University is currently running a deficit, in its operating budget, of between 7 and 9 million. But since the endowment is doing so well, Cohon argues that the university’s financial picture has actually improved.

**Endowment**
For the first time in history, CMU’s endowment is over 1 billion dollars, thanks in large part to our investments yielding a return of 16.11%. Interesting note: University policy requires that 5% of the endowment be withdrawn each year, and put into the operating budget.

**Fundraising**
The university is in the midst of a capital campaign. The goal for the first phase is 500 million dollars. The first phase will end in FY 2009. The cumulative goal for FY 2006 was 250 million; we actually ended FY 2006 with 301 million. Our goal for next year is 338 million -- we’re already at 353 million. 10% of the gifts are intended towards facilities; 40% towards expenses. The rest goes into the endowment.

**Undergraduate Applications**
As of February 1st, there have been 22,052 applications. This is an increase of 19% over last year. [President Cohon missed an opportunity here to make a joke about how applications are increasing almost as fast as tuition]

**Q&A Session**
What would you do with an endowment as large as Princeton’s?
Increase student aid; allow students with an income below a certain level to attend for free. Also, increase funding for various graduate programs. On average, university grant applications now include 60,000 for a graduate student; it would be good to drive that cost down to around 45,000.

How will faculty salaries look next year?
The increase will be no lower than last year’s, and hopefully higher.

Faculty Senate Vice Chair Vivian Loftness’s report on Qatar

First: the Qatar program is in the black. The facilities are free, and the Qatari government pays an ‘administrative’ fee each year that is largely profit.

There has been no attrition among CMU-Qatar students. The programs are popular. The students in the program aren’t up to CMU-Pittsburgh standards, but they’re good. The faculty over there report enjoying the experience, and encourage more people to visit. IN PARTICULAR, the program needs TAs. So if you have an ABD student who would like to write, get teaching experience, and more pay, Qatar may be a possibility.

The University, when we established the program, received a large gift from Qatar. We aren’t allowed to say how large this gift was, because other universities might be jealous and embarrassed that their gifts aren’t as big (note the way I am not making this up). However, the PLB *can* tell you that this gift was in the “tens of millions” of dollars. Two tens? Three tens? Nine tens? The Faculty Senate doesn’t know, because the figure would surely embarrass someone.
The tightly contested Faculty Senator race between Erik Thiessen and Anna Fisher is over. While both of them ran a hard campaign, Anna has been elected as the department’s newest faculty Senator.

Early returns seemed to indicate that Thiessen might win, which sparked celebration at a Fisher rally. However, it became apparent that the celebration had been premature when all precincts finished reporting. Mike Scheier, who cast the only vote in the election, voted for Fisher, meaning she won with 100% of the votes, a historic landslide. Congratulations to our newest Faculty Senator!

The PLB has conducted an extensive analysis of the Fisher campaign materials (leaflets, mass mailings, website, etc) and, as a public service, we present this overview of:

Likely Goals of Fisher’s Senate Tenure

1) Get the +/- back into grading

2) Figure out whether “Qatar” is pronounced Cutter or Cuh-TAR

3) Eat own body weight in mini-sausages at senate receptions (whoops, looks like she copied that one from the Thiessen campaign website)

4) Fact finding mission into shopping conditions at local shoe stores

5) Introduce legislation mandating 4-dessert workday

6) Stay awake during near-majority of Faculty Senate Meetings

7) Subcommittees, subcommittees, subcommittees!
Staff Council Notes, March 2007

-- Volunteers wanted!
-- Nutritionist/Dietitian speaker volunteer wanted
-- ‘Focus’ distribution problems
-- ‘Focus’ says: More staff contributions, please!
-- Save the date: Open Forum

Volunteers are desperately needed for the upcoming Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day (‘TODASTW’). Contact Leslie Rhodes at Lrhodes@andrew.cmu.edu or call her (x9527) if you like spending time with kids and want to participate. Leslie’s a really nice gal and would love to hear from you. You can sign up for as much or as little time as you wish, and there’s a wide variety of events from which to choose to assist with.

Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day

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<th>Date of event:</th>
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<td>Registration* closes:</td>
<td>Fri. April 13th</td>
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The next issue of the ‘Focus’ newsletter (on April 1st; see your mailbox) will have more details.

*to register your child to participate in the event

Staff Council Benefits Committee is planning a healthy cooking demonstration class (date TBA), and is in search of a nutritionist/dietitian speaker volunteer who has experience conducting such classes. If you know anyone who is interested and qualified, contact Jacqueline Cipa at jcipa@andrew.cmu.edu

There were distribution problems with the last issue of the CMU newsletter, ‘Focus’, in some departments (‘Focus’ is the newsletter printed on bright white paper & folded in half, for those who’ve lost track of all the newsletters they get!). For example, faculty seemed to successfully receive the issue in their mailboxes, whereas many staff did not. The problem was introduced to Staff Council leadership and they acknowledged they’re aware of it, and are taking steps to remedy it. ‘Focus’ is intended for faculty and staff so, in theory, all faculty and staff should receive a copy of each issue in their mailbox.

Relatedly, some Staff Council members who help produce ‘Focus’ put out the alert that there is an alarming dearth of staff contributions. Currently, faculty contributions dominate. We were told that submissions of any length are welcome, from letters to the editor to an article. They only ask that the content be at least tangentially relevant to the campus-dwelling demographic. Did you learn a new hobby this summer like winemaking or beerbrewing? Have you met up for potlucks with CMU friends for the last few years? Is your job really, really odd? Did you run into a CMU person in Nepal? Hopefully, you will unflinchingly submit a story, the stars will ethereally align, and the next issue will unfailingly appear in your mailbox!

Save the date! It looks as if the next CMU Open Forum will be on transportation issues (Port Authority and pedestrian safety). We’re still trying to round up willing panel discussants, so it hasn’t been advertised yet. The Forum is scheduled for Wednesday, May 2, in McConomy Auditorium. It’ll either be from noon to 1, or 1 to 2.
Assistant Professor Assists Scary Man’s Attempt to Approach Mike Scheier

When Erik Thiessen saw a stranger approach him in Baker Hall, looking for Mike Scheier, he knew just what to do. “I’m an assistant professor -- I assist people!” said Thiessen.

The young man, who looked vaguely like a student and was carrying a huge sheaf of thick manila folders under his arm, approached Thiessen on the 3rd floor of Baker Hall early in the evening. “Excuse me,” said the unnamed man, “Could you point me to the head psychologist? I’m looking for him.”

After Thiessen gave him directions, the young man thanked him, and said, “I hope you have a blessed day! That was a big help. I woke up this morning with a vision, a vision that I was supposed to find the head psychologist and tell him this quote. The quote is: Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”

As of press time, Thiessen has not assisted any other scary people in their search for Mike Scheier, but if any axe-wielding maniacs enter Baker Hall, they can rest assured that they’ll be able to find directions.

Scary Man Approaches Mike Scheier

A Message from Mike Scheier:

I was working in my office last night around 6 and an unfamiliar man worked into my office. Turned out that he was very religious and on a mission from God. I found it very difficult to get him to leave. He remained passive throughout our interaction, but he made me very uneasy by some of the things that he said and did. I called University police after he left. They caught up with him by the tennis courts and presented a warning for trespass. They said if he comes back on campus, they will arrest him. I don’t think he will be back, but thought I’d pass this information along just to inform you of my experience. He was an African-American male, perhaps early 20’s, about 5’4”, medium, muscular build, and held a well worn bible as we talked.

PLB Shout-Out

This month’s PLB Shout-Out goes to my TA in Cognitive Psychology, Jamie Jirout. Cog Psy is a big course with a lot of administration required -- but fortunately, I hardly have to do any of it since Jamie has taken over writing quizzes, writing instructions for the homeworks, watching over Blackboard submissions, and alphabetizing things. Thanks Jamie!

Remember, anyone can submit a Shout-Out. Just e-mail thiessen@andrew.cmu.edu

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Which is to say, they oscillate between “moderately sloppy” and “wholly fabricated.”
Recycling Fever: Early results indicate that it may be less contagious than swine flu.

Can you identify the two current faculty members in this picture? It was taken in the 70s, a time when faculty meetings look like they would have been that much more swinging than they are now!
April’s Graduate Student of the Month is Akiko Mizuno. She taught the PLB all about what it’s like to work with participants with autism, and where to get good Japanese food (California -- so the tip might not come in handy all that often).

**PLB: Tell us a little about yourself.**
AM: I grew up in Japan. After high school, I came to the United States. First, I went to community college, and then I transferred to San Diego State University. I got my bachelor’s degree there, and after I graduated, I stayed in the same lab where I had worked as an undergrad for a year and a half, as a research assistant. Then I came here!

**PLB: What kind of work were you doing in your lab?**
AM: I did fMRI work there, especially on visual-motor tasks with participants with autism.

**PLB: So I imagine that working with Marcel was a natural fit for you.**
AM: Absolutely.

**PLB: What kind of research are you doing now?**
AM: I’ve started getting interested in mirror neuron systems. Everyone talks about them in autism research, but I feel a bit of a gap between the knowledge and trying to explain everything with them. That’s why I’m interested in perspective taking in autism. To imitate something, or to understand someone’s intention of the behavior, you have to have the ability to understand someone’s perspective. It’s a bit hard to do this kind of task on a computer, so you can do imaging. And most of the studies on perspective taking have been done with children. In my task, I have two components of perspective taking. One is guessing what another person can see, vs. responding to what you’re seeing. The other one is switching perspective: so, who does “I” refer to during comprehension. It switches across sessions. I’m finished with my pilot data – I have 8 pilot subjects. The task seems to be working with typical subjects. Now I’m at the point to start collecting data with people with autism.

**PLB: You had a lot of research experience before coming here. How have you found being a graduate student is different than being a research assistant?**
AM: As a research assistant, I had more of a social life! I like being in grad school a lot, because I can expand my knowledge. For example, the course I took last semester, cognitive core, was a good opportunity for me to expand my knowledge and my interests in cognitive psychology. Also, I’m taking the PDP course now, and it’s my very first experience with computational psychology. If you are working as a research assistant, your world is more limited: your computer, your paper, your adviser.
PLB: So what do you do to entertain yourself, when you’re not doing research?
AM: I like to run outside. Usually I run for an hour, although I’m not such a good runner. I’m easily distracted by flowers, birds, squirrels. I always stop.

PLB: Any other hobbies?
AM: I also love to read. Especially Japanese novels. Also, I used to play piano a lot. I keep saying that I need to get a rental piano, but I haven’t done it yet. But after I move in July, I’m hoping to rent a piano. Or maybe buy, if I can get a good deal. Also, I love to dance. I never got any professional training, but I love it. I’m thinking of trying the tango soon. Dancing is great, because – especially salsa – because you can dance with live music, and I love it, I really love it.

PLB: Since you’re from Japan, how have you found American food, and Pittsburgh food in particular?
AM: I like food, in general, in California, better than most other places in America. You can get really authentic Japanese food there. But I love food in general, and I love cooking. I usually cook at home. When I go out, I wish the food portions were a little smaller sometimes.

PLB: Are you much of a sushi fan? Where is the best sushi in Pittsburgh?
AM: I love sushi! If you ask me if I want cake or sushi, I would pick sushi. But I’ve been afraid to try sushi in Pittsburgh yet.

PLB: OK, then we’re nearly too the end. You just have to make it through the Three Tough Questions. Which are almost as scary as sushi in Pittsburgh. Number 1, what for you, is the big question that you want to answer with your research?
AM: Why, and how, does the brain work differently in people with autism. Initially, I came to the US to try to study school social work. I was very interested in children who have various difficulties in school. After I started learning about autism, I was amazed. There are so many misunderstandings about autism, in Japan especially. In Japan, perhaps because of the different culture, autism is so misunderstood socially. People don’t know how it happens; there’s a belief that children become autistic from being neglected.

PLB: If you weren’t a graduate student, what would you be doing?
AM: I have two ideas. One is writing, some kind of writer, or the editor of of science magazines,. Something relating publication. I’ve always been interested in writing, and I’m glad that part of my career will require writing. The second one is, I love to organize parties. I want to be, a party planner, like a wedding planner, or something. I’m people-oriented. I love to make someone’s day special.

PLB: Number three. It’s the bottom of the 9th inning, tie game, at the World Baseball Classic. Who are you rooting for: Japan, or the United States?
AM: DUH. First of all, soccer is my favorite sport. Baseball is my second. But I’m from Japan, and my heart always belongs to Japan! I’m Japanese.