Psycho? Logical? Bulletin
May, 2006

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But wait! There’s more! (pp. 5-11)
Congratulations to John Anderson!

Dr. John Anderson has been selected as the first ever winner of Heineken Prize for Cognitive Science, for his “ground-breaking theory of human cognition.” The six Heineken Prizes for science, scholarship and art are presented every other year during a special session of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. This year the presentation will take place on Thursday 28 September at the Beurs van Berlage Building in Amsterdam.

Go Go Haley Vlach!

Psychology major Haley Vlach has received the prestigious Gretchen Lankford Award, which is given to a senior who plans to go to graduate school and pursue a career in education. Haley is a fantastic student and a great person (despite being a fan of the University of Oregon Ducks). Not only has she done well in her coursework, and been active in a number of university groups, Haley has helped the department as a TA: she’s currently a TA for both introduction to Psychology and Developmental Research Methods. If you see Haley, be sure to congratulate her, and wish her luck in her transition to graduate school!

May Events

May 1st: Christine Watson Brown Bag
May 3rd: Undergraduate Research Methods Poster Session, 4-6 PM
May 4th: Katia Dilkina Brown Bag
May 9th: Norma Chang dissertation defense
May 10th: Meeting of the Minds
May 11th: Lindsey Lopez Brown Bag
May 12: Katia Dilkina Brown Bag
May 15: Jared Danker Brown Bag
May 16: Yan Mu Brown Bag
May 18: Saudamini Roy Brown Bag
May 19: David Huss Brown Bag
May 21: Graduation
May 22: Jeffrey Horn Brown Bag
May 22: Jen Brace Brown Bag
May 23: Jamie Jirout Brown Bag
Undergraduate Research Methods
Poster Session
Wednesday, May 3rd, 4-6 PM
Baker Hall Atrium (outside A51)

Students in this semester’s research method classes are poised to show off the results of their hard work at a poster session that is sure to amaze and astound. Come see their posters, and learn the answer to many questions, including:

- Can external stimuli change our judgment of the passage of time??
- Does finger size predict spatial memory??
- Can talking to yourself help you accomplish complex tasks??
- Should you talk on the phone and play video games at the same time??

The answers to these questions, and many others, will be revealed! Also, there will be cookies.

Don’t Forget: Meeting of the Minds

May 10th, University Center, 10 AM to 5 PM

For even more undergraduate research goodness, be sure to check out the Meeting of the Minds on Wednesday, May 10th. Several seniors in the department will be presenting the results of their Honors theses, and a prize will be awarded for the best psychology research project.
Shirt Update

Plaid Brain: the T-shirt
Approximate price: $11

Plaid Brain: The Polo
Approximate price: $19

So far, the response to the opportunity for a department shirt has been underwhelming. It’s true: I have not been whelmed. If you don’t want a shirt, that’s cool; for the record, as the weather gets warmer, I prefer to go shirtless myself. But, if you DO want a shirt, you need to speak up. If I don’t hear interest from more people, we’re not going to order any shirts.

What I need to know from you:
Would you be interested in purchasing either shirt?
If so, which one?
Would either be acceptable for you? Do you have a preference?
What size would you need?

Sports

The intra-mural psychology soccer team fell one goal short of making the playoffs, losing their last match by a hard-fought final score of 7-6. However, the team made strides in several important areas throughout the season, improving markedly in such critical soccer skills as ball-striking, team defense, passing, and rioting. Just wait ‘til next season!

Pictured: Team Captain David Rakison. Despite wearing a muscle shirt “for the ladies,” Rakison was unable to lead the soccer team to the playoffs.
Everyone in the department is saddened by the imminent departure of Marlene Berhmann and David Plaut. At least one group, however, is hoping to turn this sad event into an opportunity: Assistant Professor Brooke Feeney, Anna Fisher, Erik Thiessen, and Nicholas Peter Yeung. The four assistant professors are planning to pool their money and purchase the Plaut/Berhmann residence, with hopes of turning it into a swinging party pad.

“We came up with the idea at lunch one day. That house is so fantastic, we all agreed on that,” said Thiessen, “but none of us could afford it individually. We realized that if we pooled our resources, it just might work.”

“And just think of the parties we’ll be able to throw,” added Yeung. “It’s going to be a blast. I’ve even come up with a name for the house. At first, we were going to call it the Department of Partying and Keggology, but that’s too long. So I came up with calling the house ‘The DeparTAYment.’ As in: whenever I’m not at my office, look for me at the DeparTAYment! I’ll be there all the time, baby.”

According to sources, there was some early controversy over who would be chair of the DeparTAYment. It was settled using a time-honored party-pad tradition.

“We had a wet t-shirt contest and I won,” explained Dr. Yeung. “We placed our t-shirts in buckets, and mine absorbed the most water.”

“Yes, but mine initially absorbed the fastest,” noted Dr. Fisher. “So I’m vice-chair. I have to say, though, I don’t really understand why these contests are so popular.”

The four members of the DeparTAYment have big plans for the future.

“I’m going to be doing keg-stands all the time,” said Dr. Feeney. “We’re going to have a bunch of kegs on the second floor, and I’m going to stand on them. For hours. I’ve heard it’s going to be fun.”

In addition, Dr. Yeung has been working on developing a gravity bong. “I’ve bought this huge brass bell, and I’ve got a ramp that will allow me to drop it from the second story. Gravity will cause it to fall to the driveway, and make a huge bong sound when it hits. It’s going to rock.”

Real-estate agents in the area have advised several of their clients to sell their houses, as the arrival of the hard-rocking DeparTAYment is sure to lower property values.
Caption Contest

Someone smart once said “A picture is worth a thousand words.” The same person also said “Ketchup is twice the value of mustard except on Tuesdays when it is double” but we’ll let that one pass. Anyhow, in the spirit of the new PLB editorial-ship, in which nobody in the department is safe, there’s a new monthly competition. You’ve all seen this sort of thing before: There’s a picture or some sort of hilarious or ambiguous nature and you, the reader, have to come up with an interesting/funny/scientifically relevant phrase to match with it. So, imagine, if you will, a picture of George Bush reading a story about Jack and the beanstalk” to a group of young children when he’s told “Mr. President, the country is under attack” - a suitable caption might read “Hmmm, that must be a damn large tack for us to be under it” or perhaps “Is it time for milk?” or even “Don’t sell the cow!”

In this, the first (and who knows last) competition, your job is to provide a phrase for the picture below. Try to keep it clean – and keep in mind that any words that you have Ken speaking will probably make more sense than the ones he comes up with himself. Send your captions to rakison@andrew.cmu.edu and the best will be published in next month’s issue. Be sure to specify whether you want your name kept anonymous when the caption is published. The prize? It is TBA – but it may just be the joy of seeing your amusing captions in print.

At the same time, we want to use your pictures of faculty, staff, and grad students for this competition each month. So, feel free to send amusing pictures of department members to me via email – and if a number of funny pictures are sent in we will have multiple pictures in each issue.

Happy Captioning!

David Rakison
May’s graduate student of the month is Kate Walker-Smith. She’s a first year student in the joint SDS Psychology degree program. We chatted about the program, Immigration, and *Pride and Prejudice*. To find out what Kate had to say, read on.

**PLB: Tell us a little about yourself.**
I’m originally from the Philadelphia area, but when I was 10, I moved to New Jersey. I came back to Philadelphia for undergrad; I went to the University of Pennsylvania. I thought I was going to study International Relations, but got into philosophy, then took Intro to Psych with Henry Gleitman and fell in love with psychology.

**PLB: What did you do after graduation?**
At first, I was most interested in clinical psychology; I think a lot of people feel that way when they first discover psychology. So I worked in addictions treatment research for two years. I worked in a methadone maintenance clinic, conducting research to see if behavioral interventions that work in laboratories work in community-based settings.

**PLB: So what led you from that to CMU?**
A friend lent me a book by Robert Cialdini about persuasion. It got me thinking about how my interests in clinical psychology could be thought of as manipulating or persuading people – in a good way, but still persuasion. I looked at a lot of persuasion-based social psychology programs, but I really wanted to explore how persuasion led to decisions in a kind of applied way. So now I’m in both: the Social Decision Sciences department, and the psychology department, because it was really important to me that I maintain a strong back-ground in psychology.

**PLB: What should people know about the joint program that they might not already?**
Some people don’t know what happens in the application process. I had no idea about the SDS program when I was applying. My fiancé, who’s now in the History Department here, was looking at CMU and he suggested it to me. I knew the psychology program was ranked highly and well-respected, and I looked at it, and found that the people whose interests matched mine were jointly appointed with SDS. So through that I came upon a link to the joint program. Everywhere else, I applied to psychology programs. I ended up coming here, and it’s been fantastic. Although there is some uncertainty about what the joint program actually means.

**PLB: Could you elaborate on that?**
To some extent, it feels like joint students just take psychology classes, and get one person on their committee, and that’s it. I think people in both departments would really like it to be more than that. But there’s no real clear way to build beyond that. I think it would be great if there were more joint meetings, talks, and activities. But like I said, there’s a lot of upside: I got to know the first year psychology students very well, for example.

**What are the program’s requirements?**
We take three courses a semester for the first two years. It makes that first two weeks, when we’re doing immigration in addition to those three courses, very intense. You’re exhausted at the end of each day. In our second year, we present a research paper – we’re strongly encouraged to get started on research for that in our first year. Then, at the end of the two years of courses, we take qualifying exams.

*As you’ll see in the Faculty Senate report, there’s reason to believe I’m an expert on Pride and/or Prejudice.*
What kinds of questions are you interested in researching?
I find the internet fascinating, and so it ends up in a lot of my research. One project I’m working on, with George Loewenstein, relates to the confirmation bias. There’s a lot of research on how people react to counter-attitudinal opinions. Less is known about the specific emotions people feel as they read these things. We think there might be future applications to politics: do people seek out counter-attitudinal political blogs before an election to get themselves righteously angry? How do their reactions change if their candidate wins or loses the election? I’m also working with Robyn Dawes on a linear model to predict acceptance into internet communities, specifically forums. I feel as though it involves many of the same things that predict acceptance in real life, but a bit simplified. One of the things I’ve noticed with these forums is that the best way to get accepted is to flatter the in-group. It’s better to do that than to say intelligent but critical things.

That’s a handy tip for assistant professors.
Grad students, too, but don’t always follow my own advice! I got interested in that topic because I was playing a game called NationStates that had a forum attached to it. It was almost like I was hypothesis-testing as I was interacting on the forum.

What other kinds of games do you play?
As a psychologist, I play games with people all the time! I love playing Scrabble, but I haven’t found anyone around here to play with.

What else do you do to entertain yourself?
I minored in Fine Arts. I have a sewing machine, so I sewed all the curtains in our apartment, and tried to do some interesting decorating. I’m very into hands-on, functional stuff. My fiancé and I have a cat who adopted us when we moved to Pittsburgh, and now we have a puppy that we adopted in January. It’s fun to apply my knowledge of behavioral psychology to training them.

It’s time to wrap up with the PLB’s patented “Three Tough Questions.” First: what, for you, is the big question in your research?
Actually – I don’t think there is a big question. I was a philosophy major. I spent a lot of time in philosophy classes talking about big questions, and I came to the conclusion that there aren’t any answers, so you just have to live by what you think is important. For me, one of the things that came out of that is that I’m interested in science because I enjoy the process. The process of research, and its application, that’s what interests me.

Number Two: Think of a piece of literature that you love, and tell us how it’s related to your own research.
I love Jane Austen novels. I’ve read Pride & Prejudice at least ten times. I get something different out of it every time, and I’m convinced that you can find evidence for every social psychological theory in Austen novels. One thing that connects to my research is that there are lots of social interactions, and people trying to get other people to like them. The characters who end up winning out in the end are often not trying to do that explicitly. In Pride & Prejudice, there are three characters: Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy, and Miss Bingley. Miss Bingley clearly likes Mr. Darcy, and tries to win him over with witty repartee, and making snide comments about others. What actually wins him over, though, is Elizabeth being a loyal person; she doesn’t talk in a nasty way in public about other people. She jokes around more, and seems to enjoy life. In internet forums, part of people’s problem is that they think if they outwit someone in a debate, or make snide comments about someone else, they’ll be accepted. I think in the long run, that doesn’t work. The people who end up accepted are the ones who are more joking and friendly.

Last question: spring… or fall?
Spring! That’s not a tough question. I was ecstatic when it seemed like spring again.
Subtextual Healing

The new statue of Mao Yisheng came up at the Senate meeting. Members of the philosophy department were curious that it got installed without anyone knowing about it, since CMU (now) has a Public Arts Commission that’s supposed to get input from people and provide info about these things.

Various other residents of Baker Hall mentioned that they didn’t know anything about it, either, and eventually the “gentleman from psychology” chimed in to corroborate that point, and also to suggest that perhaps ONE meeting of the Public Arts Committee wasn’t enough to get the information out there, and maybe for future statues, we should hold two meetings: one to discuss possible placements, and a second one after a first potential placement has been settled on, so we can get everyone on board.

After that oratorial moment, another senator stood up and said, “I don’t understand this discussion. I can’t tell if we’re having it because of where the statue is going, and the process that led to that... or because of WHO the statue is of. I sense an almost racist subtext to this discussion, and I don’t know if I want to interpret it any more than that.”

As per usual, the Senate talked more after that, but nothing happened. However, should the Senate engage in any future subtextual healing, you’ll hear about it!

FCE Change: Later!

Susan Ambrose and Joel Smith presented the results of a year-long study of the new online FCE form at the last Senate meeting, a report that exhaustively covers the reasons for the change and its results. If you’re interested: http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/org/fac-senate/FCEReport2006Ambrose.pdf

The summary: the new form isn’t working because it’s too long.

The solution: ask the Senate’s permission to EITHER create a new (4-8 question) online form, or go back to the old form.

The Senate’s response: create a committee to look into this matter and present their conclusion some time next year, at which point the Senate could vote on it. Or form a committee to look at the first committee’s suggestion, maybe.

The conclusion: Even in a simple yes/no vote, with the right answer clearly obvious, the Senate will come up with some third moon-language response that will carry the day. I guess the good news is that at least we didn’t actively make the situation worse.

It’s becoming increasingly clear that no one is going to look at my ability to sway the Senate and say “That fella reminds me of a young Stephen Douglas. Or at least Jimmy Stewart in Mr. Smith goes to Washington.”
PLB Editor-Emeritus Lori Holt submitted this picture of the statue of Mao Yisheng* outside Baker Hall.

It got us thinking: now that Mao has broken the seal for us, what other statues might we want to put outside Baker Hall?

In that spirit, the PLB presents:

Statue Suggestions!

1) Department Karaoke. In statue form, I think it’d be really moving. And the statues would be better singers than some of us...

2) Brave Sir Ken Battles the Squirrel. See artist’s rendition to the right

3) Sheldon Cohen. Sheldon has requested this one be constructed in a classroom, so that the statue could take over his teaching duties

4) The Night Before the Dissertation Defense. I think this one could work if it were sort of reminiscent of Munch’s The Scream.

Do you have statue suggestions of your own? Send them to CMUPLB@hotmail.com!

*That thing that looks like a pig’s head? Yeah... it’s a roasted pig’s head***

**Subtext!****

***Our only defense is that when the editor-emeritus tells us to jump, our only response is, “How high, Editor-Emeritus Sir?”
With the FCE forms being so long, lots of people have been concerned that their students aren’t filling out FCEs. In a situation like this, where can you turn to get an accurate sense of what students thought of your class? We don’t need no stinkin’ FCEs. We have www.ratemyprofessor.com. Let’s see how people have been rated...

“A brilliant but tough prof. It won’t be easy, but you learn lots.”

“She makes the class interesting as well as educational. A great teacher.”

“This professor is awesome. We have only had two classes with her so far, but they were the best first two classes I’ve ever experienced in a course in my seven years as an undergrad.”

“Ken Kotovksy is an...

Because the PLB is a family publication, the most recent comment about Ken had to be censored.

“OK class. The guy is hot, and all the girls love him and his accent.”

“Awesome teacher! He was very good at what he taught, his slide shows were like the best ever. Not to mention I had a HUGE crush on this teacher. What a smile!”
Ever-alert PLB reader Sheldon Cohen spotted this picture suggesting that the bird flu has spread to Florida, and is decimating the flamingo population. PLB readers are advised to take the necessary precautions if travelling to Florida!

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**Movie Trivia**

Last month, we asked two questions: Identify the movie in which the lead actress, pretending to be Russian, sings “Back in the USSR” (Heartbreakers) and tell us which movie might have been alternatively titled “The Walrus-Cousin that Comes After Six” (The Seventh Seal).

Lindsey Lopez and Jared Danker answered the questions (in record time, I might add) and so they get to pose two questions this month:

1) What was the name of the shopping center in Back to the Future where Marty meets Doc with the Delorean?

2) In what movie does one of the main characters order dry white toast and water?

First person to answer both questions correctly gets to pose two stumpers next month!

E-mail your answers to:

**CMUPLB@hotmail.com**