In This Issue:

Department Kick Ball (pg 2)
Writing Tips (pg 3)
Reader Responses (pg 7)
Et Cetera (pg 11)
Kick-ballers Wanted!

Kickball, anyone?

Want to play kickball this summer with other members of the Psychology department? Want to see if your kicking ability has improved since age 10? Want to see how this guy slides into home plate while wearing that unitard?

If you’d like to participate, please e-mail Christine Watson at cewatson@andrew.cmu.edu. Frequency of games and dates/times will be determined by those interested in playing. Games will be FUN -- no last picks, guaranteed.

Brooke Feeney named MPP:
Most Practical Psychologist

Brooke Feeney has won the First Annual Award for Practical Psychology, awarded at the Mind Gym Academic Awards ceremony in London. Mind Gym launched the award this year to encourage “pioneering, scientifically rigorous” research.

Dr. Feeney won the award for a paper that appeared in February’s issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, investigating the consequences of spousal support.

The award comes with a 6,000 pound prize (that’s British pounds, not 6,000 pounds of, say, pork). As of press time, none of this money has been spent buying the PLB lavish office furniture. Just thought we’d mention that.
Writing Tips

Verbs HAS to agree with their subjects.

Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.

And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction.

It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.

Avoid cliches like the plague.

Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.

Be more or less specific.

Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.

And also, too, never, ever use repetitive redundancies.

No sentence fragments.

Contractions aren’t necessary and shouldn’t be used.

Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.

Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary; it’s highly superfluous.

One should NEVER generalize.

Comparisons are as bad as cliches.

Don’t use no double negatives.

Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.

One-word sentences? Eliminate.

Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.

The passive voice is to be ignored.

Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary. Parenthetical words however should be enclosed in commas.

Never use a big word when a diminutive one would suffice.

Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.

Understatement is always the absolute best way to put forth earth-shaking ideas.

Use the apostrophe in it’s proper place and omit it when its not needed.

Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.”

If you’ve heard it once, you’ve heard it a thousand times: Resist hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it correctly.

Puns are for children, not groan readers.

Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.

Even IF a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.

Who needs rhetorical questions?

Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.

And finally... Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
Robes are optional at graduation...

... but the PLB is required by journalistic integrity to admit that those faculty who DO wear robes look pretty classy...
... despite photographic evidence that it is possible to look classy at graduation without a robe!

And of course, Terri, Emilie, and Erin are always classy!
Grandma squirrel, celebrating her 100th birthday*, returned to her home today on Murray Avenue. Grandma was part of the forced squirrel migration organized by Psychology Professor Ken Kotovsky several years ago. Along with many other local squirrels, grandma was shipped across the river to the South Side. “Life there was miserable,” grandma said**. “There are bars everywhere, and drunken noisy people on the street who piss on the sidewalks.”

Grandma hopes to reestablish her and her family in their homeland where they are making a nest in the Kotovsky attic. They are planning an open house next weekend. You can enter through the hole off the gutter on the south side of the

Several squirrel photographers were present to record the historic return to Squirrel Hill. Ken Kotovsky has argued that the squirrels were actually using the cameras for illicit surveillance purposes.

Grandma Squirrel is one of the few returning squirrels old enough to have firsthand memories of their traditional homeland in Squirrel Hill

*100 Squirrel Years, of course

** It’s a well known fact that once you reach a certain advanced age, you just don’t appreciate the South Side any more
It’s time for more...

Reader Responses

An Anonymous Reader Writes

Dear Editor, in an article about a previous letter regarding a sex column, the following point was made:

“Couples, why not give yourselves the gift of anal sex this holiday season? Just because the act is predominant among gay men does not imply that the act must be limited to gay men or that receiving anal sex is emasculating.”

While it is a very interesting holiday season suggestion, one difficulty with the idea is the issue of gift-wrapping. Most of the checkout counters in stores seem ill-equipped for the job of wrapping this kind of present, especially those with counters or tables manned by well-intentioned volunteers supporting charitable causes. Also, an amateur doing it themselves could make a real mess of it. This reader is wondering, do you have any suggestions about how one might handle this? Any help would be appreciated.

Denise Janicki Writes

Thanks for differentiating me from the pigeon [in last month’s PLB]. I’d find it rather off-putting to be blamed for the white-wash on people’s windshields ;)

PLB Shout-Out

June’s PLB Shout-Out goes to Tim Carroll, for a couple of different reasons. First of all, Tim is the guy who delivers the PLB fresh to your internet every month. After our hard-working staff writes the PLB, we hand it off to Tim, who somehow makes sure that it’s available online. Without Tim, we’d have to hire a troop of paperboys to deliver the PLB door-to-door. Second, Tim created the giant map of the department hanging on the wall of the reception room. It’s already helped me out several times! I used to spend a lot of time giving directions, but now my e-mails to people just say “Go until you find the glass-walled room with the map, and you can figure it out from there.” That’s way more efficient -- and accurate -- than the directions I usually give. So thanks, Tim!
Happy Birthday, Erin!

The staff got together to celebrate Erin’s birthday last month, at which time the PLB discovered that there are some staff members who are definitely camera-shy. Fortunately, Erin’s not one of them!

Faculty Senate Report

Not much happened at the last Faculty Senate meeting. The high point was discussing whether the membership of the Diversity Committee was diverse enough, which is kind of like one of those Greek philosophical riddles. If I shoot an arrow, and each second it covers half of the distance to its goal, will it ever reach the Diversity Committee?

Other than that, I just tried to get used to parliamentary procedure. Making motions, abstaining, things like that: it’s important to do them at the right time! So at the next meeting, I should be ready for action. If you have any issues you’d like me to bring up with the Faculty Senate, just let me know! My e-mail is fisher49@andrew.cmu.edu.

- Transcribed and embroidered ever so slightly by ET
June’s Graduate Student of the Month is Chris Paynter. Chris, fresh off of his first brownbag, talks about what it’s like to be a graduate student, classical piano, and more.

**PLB: Tell us a little about your past? Where are you from? Where did you go to college?**

CP: I was born in Illinois, but my family moved to Albany, New York when I was six, where we stayed ever since. I got my undergraduate degree at SUNY Stony Brook, where I graduated summa cum laude with a double major in biochemistry and psychology.

**PLB: Why did you choose CMU for graduate school?**

CP: I went to Carnegie Mellon because I was very interested in the CNBC program. I like to try to find connections between different areas, and I wanted a program that looked at how the brain works from a multidisciplinary perspective. I am happy that the CNBC program provides forums where people from different departments can interact and where there are opportunities for cross-disciplinary research.

**PLB: What kind of research have you been doing?**

CP: For my first-year project I did a study on the EEG correlates of initial feeling-of-knowing. In our experiment, we showed people a series of math problems, some of which were repeated up to twenty times over the course of the experiment. When people first saw the problem, they had to quickly decide whether to solve it by calculating the answer on scrap paper or retrieving the answer from memory. A previous study using this task had shown that people could make this initial decision whether to retrieve or calculate in 850 ms (less time than they could retrieve the answer itself). The current study was designed to find the neural correlates of this feeling-of-knowing process. We found statistically significant differences in the waveforms of accurate retrieve trials and calculate trials as early as 200 ms following the stimulus onset. Furthermore, the accurate retrieve trials produced mostly right hemisphere activation, while calculate trials produced mostly left hemisphere activation, suggesting a dissociation between feeling-of-knowing and an additional “feeling-of-not-knowing” process.

Next year, I will be collaborating on an fMRI study of recognition memory following injection of midazolam, a drug known to inhibit binding of stimulus information to context. I believe my participation in this project will allow me to utilize my knowledge of biochemistry. I also plan to apply for an IGERT next spring, so I can possibly do single-unit recording work on the hippocampus and perirhinal cortex, brain regions believed to be involved in recollection and familiarity respectively.

**PLB: What’s been the biggest difference in the transition from undergraduate life to being a graduate student?**

CP: I think the biggest difference is that when you are in graduate school, you are expected to be more independent. As an undergraduate, you are for the most part learning things other people have discovered, so all the information is handed to you either through a textbook or a set of lectures. As a graduate student, you are exploring the unknown so you have to go out and find information for yourself. You also have to be able to anticipate problems and deal with them, without waiting for your advisor or someone else to tell you what to do. These to me are the biggest differences.
PLB: What do you do for fun?
CP: In my spare time, I like to listen to music, usually a mix of classical and soft rock. I am a trained classical pianist myself, so I sometimes listen to piano recordings and compare how the performer interprets the piece versus how I would have performed it. I am also a compulsive bookworm and will often check out seemingly random books out of the library and go through them even if they have nothing to do with my research. One of my pet interests is comparative history. I like to learn about other civilizations and try to find what their underlying dynamics were – why they flourished, why they eventually declined, what their political and economic structures were, what life was like under them, etc. I am also very interested in art (particularly modern art) and love going to museums. Lastly, I am a big fan of the T.V. show “Lost.”

PLB: Wow. That’s all pretty neat. Is there anything else we should know about you?
CP: Well, I also like cats very much. My family has a pet cat named Murphy. He is very active and likes to go outside.

PLB: Three more questions. First: what is the big question you want your research to answer?
CP: This answer might sound a bit ambitious, but I have always been interested in the neural underpinnings of higher cognition, specifically intelligence and creativity (both admittedly vague terms). I want to know how the brain actually finds solutions to complex problems it has never encountered before and whether the mechanisms involved are qualitatively different from those involved in simpler cognitive processes. One of my fantasies is to identify some surgical or pharmacological intervention that can dramatically raise a person’s IQ and then turn everyone in the human race into a genius. (By the way, another of my pet interests is molecular immunology, as I think it provides an interesting and comparatively concrete way to think about how an information-processing system can handle a stimulus it has never encountered before).

PLB: What would you be doing if you weren’t a graduate student?
CP: Had I not gotten into graduate school, I had a fallback plan to do an internship program in neural plasticity, after which point I would have applied to a pharmaceuticals program and probably wound up doing research for a drug company. I would be set to make more money but probably would not be having as much fun.

PLB: What, for you, is the perfect vacation?
CP: I have already done a fair amount of traveling, but one place I always wanted to visit was East Asia. I have been interested in that part of the world for some time, as they are home to some of the oldest continuous civilizations in the world, besides being an increasingly important region geopolitically. My ideal vacation would therefore be an extended tour of India, China, and Japan, long enough to get a feel for what the culture is like in those places. It would also be good to be able to see the paintings of Chang Hsuan, T’ang Yin, Toyo Sesshu, and the other great Chinese and Japanese masters in the original.
Every year, the Thiessen and Rakison labs, in fulfillment of long-established tradition, get together for a bowling tournament.

The Rakison lab gave it a good effort.

But in the end, after all the scores were calculated, and re-calculated, and even log-transformed and normalized, the Thiessen lab was victorious. This, it should be noted, is also traditional.
Every year, the students in our Research Methods classes put a lot of effort into their research, and there are some fantastic projects. As a result, the poster session is always fantastic. For photographic evidence, see these pictures!
Our May meeting was fairly low-key. We heard about the postal updates. We heard reports from many of our subcommittees. Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day reported that it would appreciate more volunteers next year. The Benefits Committee is launching a CMU staff walking club.

The Communications Committee reported on the recent Open Forum, which special guest City Councilman Bill Peduto was unfortunately unable to attend, notifying us too late to amend the announcements. In retrospect, his absence may have been fortuitous as the turnout was pitiful, due to the exquisitely inauspicious timing of the event (close to finals). Or maybe it was just too nice outside that afternoon. Who knows. Nevertheless, the Committee reported that the content of (and Q&A after) the discussion were both pretty interesting. I agree.

The Kennywood Committee reports that Kennywood Day will take place July 14th. Tickets go on sale starting June 29th. We also were informed that the reasons that the recent CMU Staff Appreciation Picnic was held indoors as opposed to outside (as in previous years) include (1.) The tents have gotten too expensive to rent, and (2.) They didn’t want attendees to tear up or trample the lawn.

Don’t forget that you can vote in the upcoming Staff Council election online from June 1st through June 15th. See the orange card in your mailbox. Hopefully our election will proceed a bit more smoothly than Student Senate’s!

Shamelessly appropriating Erik’s monthly “Shout Outs”, a special Shout Out thanks to Kathy Majors. Setting up accounts for lab supplies ordering for our current study has been quite a challenge recently, and Kathy helped me out quite a bit, sending some emails and making some calls to her contacts in CMU Procurement Services to follow up or otherwise get the ball rolling when we got stuck. Thanks also to Rochelle Croom, for similar assistance. Thanks to both Kathy and Rochelle for being patient with my initial ignorance about the proper steps in the process. And thanks, Emilie, for graciously putting up with boxes and boxes of our delivered supplies taking up space in your office!

See you in September!

Like the majestic Grizzly Bear, or the slightly less majestic skunk, the PLB is going into hibernation. Our staff will be living off of stored body fat until September 1st, when the PLB will burst forth from its den, ready to do, er, whatever it is the PLB does. Hopefully, to show off pics from everyone’s summer vacation!

The PLB Wants to Know

What did YOU do with your summer vacation?

Send Pics for the September issue to: thiessen@andrew.cmu.edu