Psycho? Logical? Bulletin!

End of Summer Special: September 2008

INSIDE:

Qatar Report (pg. 2)
Moral hazards of psychology (pg. 8)
Baker Hall haunted?(pg. 10)
And much more!
As you may know, the PLB went on a fact-finding trip to Qatar for six weeks (and one cognitive psychology course) this summer. Below, we present some of what we discovered about the country and CMU’s branch campus.

The entrance to Education City’s housing compound. “Compound” isn’t really the sort of word that attracts tourists, but the housing situation is actually very nice.

This is the typical housing for faculty. My duplex had 3 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, and enough space for me to get lost.
Some of the banners in the LAS building (where CMU used to be located; they’ve since moved to a new building).

The one on the right is dedicated to the Sheikh. Among other things, it mentions that he is the ‘Father of Qatar... moon of the country, which is full of pearls and corals.’

For many of the students, my class was their first psychology course. So I tried to use a lot of demos to make the material easier to grasp.

Here, the class used Mario Kart Wii to experience the ‘Marcel Effect’ (link) - the driver who had someone talking to him (on the right) performed worse than the driver on the left.

There were around 20 students in my class; the women tended to favor traditional dress, while the men (as seen here) - especially the ones not from Qatar - frequently dressed in more western attire.

For even more pictures, click here and/or here
**SIX NICE THINGS ABOUT VISITING DOHA**

1) The sunsets are fantastic

2) CMU flies you business class to get there. You haven’t flown until you’ve been on a flight where they constantly bring you hot towels to wipe your face, and all the scotch you can drink. Also, little footy socks so your toesies can be nice and soft.

3) CMU in employs several people on the Doha campus whose job largely includes coming to your office, and checking to see if you want something to drink, or some snacks. And then bringing them to you.

4) CMU-Q has Segways everywhere that anyone can check out. I could never think of an excuse, which made me sad that I never had the chance to sing “I crossed the desert on a Segway with no name”

5) Spicy curry Chachos. Possibly the greatest innovation in dorito-style chips since Cool Ranch.

6) The students are really enthusiastic when people from Pittsburgh come over to Doha; several of my students even bought me gifts at the end of the course. One of which was a three pound box of pastries. So much pastry

---

**Three Less Nice things about visiting CMU-Q**

1) There’s no Macintosh support. A few weeks before flying out, I requested a Mac laptop for my office in Doha, and brought several OS X programs with me. Instead of a new Apple desktop, I had an old Dell laptop.

2) You will be brutally jetlagged for the first week of classes. This is also Orientation week. Trust me: if someone offers to get some of the orientation done ahead of time via video conference, jump at the chance!

3) Believe it or not, it’s kind of hot there.

---

**Cuisine of Qatar**

I had the chance to try lots of new dishes in Qatar, but I wasn’t bold enough to eat everything that crossed my path. I only ate 2 of the 3 animals pictured below. Can you guess which one I didn’t try?
This month’s PLB Shout-Out goes out to all of the people in Doha who helped make the experience fun. All of the staff and faculty were helpful, but three people stand out in particular. When you go to Doha, you get assigned a ‘Q-Buddy’ who shows you the ropes, and my QB was Anqi Qian, who kept me from getting lost, dehydrated, or starved on a fairly regular basis. Without her, I don’t think I would have had any home-cooked food during my time in Qatar. Unless microwaving counts as a form of home-cooking.

Second, Eleanor Adiong was in charge of pretty much every detail I needed - where to find office supplies, how to get reimbursed, how to operate the copy machine and printers. All of the stuff that I wouldn’t have been able to teach without.

Finally, Fadhel Annan did heroic work making sure I could leave the country when my visa expired. It was looking pretty bad there for a while - it seemed as though Fadhel was going to have to smuggle me out of the country, but he burned the midnight oil to get all of the paperwork in order.

Congratulations to Erika Taylor!

Erika won a Young Investigator award for her poster at Biomag 2008, in Sapporo, Japan.

Great job, Erika! And, er, domo arigato?

Good news for Dr. Sheldon Cohen, too!

Sheldon Cohen, Professor of Psychology at Carnegie Mellon has been reported to break an earlier record in the amount of money he has won or be given in various email messages this month. The total far exceeds $3 billion dollars and derives from Kings, people stealing from the banks they work for, people looking for business partners in the US, etc. Much of this money comes from the Nigerian national treasury.

Cohen has donated ALL OF THESE “EARNINGS” to the CMU Psychology Departments Coke Fund. “It will be nice not to have to pay for my afternoon Diet Coke in the future,” Cohen said. Department head Michael Scheier lauded Cohen’s generosity. “This is another example of Dr. Cohen’s enormous contributions to the culture of our department,” Scheier said.
Summer Pictures

The PLB isn’t the only member of the department to have adventures this summer. Here’s what a few of your other colleagues have been up to.

Bobby visited Istanbul. Not Constantinople.

Jamie Jirout got married.

Lynne and Bobby found that even in Berlin, you might not be able to get out of attending a faculty meeting.

Lynne, following in the footsteps of Kennedy and Reagan, made an appearance at the Brandenburg Gate.

And the department was visited by an old colleague...
... who was in town for Erin Ingvalson’s successful dissertation defense. Congratulations to Dr. Ingvalson!

Finally, the department welcomed J. David Creswell with a Happy Hour.

He got the full “New Guy” treatment...

.... including a demonstration from Theresa about how she would choke him if he ‘crossed her.’

... and Anna showing him how to feign a ‘mild coma’ if someone asks him to be Faculty Senator
In the August 20 issue of the City Pages, reporter Andy Mulkerin argued that students at many colleges are unknowingly supporting the war effort, “especially at Carnegie Mellon,” because CMU is among the top 10 universities receiving funding from the department of defense.

Activist David Meieran suggested in the article that students should avoid taking part in any activities that have military ties. However, these ties aren’t always obvious, according to Meieran. Meieran cited “one CMU psychology study” which was designed to improve decision making amongst US Navy officers.

Apparently the City Paper believes that it is important to have sailors crewing nuclear vessels making the worst decisions possible. But maybe the City Paper has a point: a lot of the work that goes on in this department could have unintended, even disastrous consequences.

Thus, as a public service, the PLB illustrates some of the evil that science in the department might wreak upon the globe.

The Scientist: Erik Thiessen
The Science: Working to understand how infants learn language
The Moral Danger: Violating many of the Ten Commandments (such as taking the name of the Lord in vain) requires the use of language. By teaching babies language, Thiessen is helping them to break Biblical law.

The Scientist: David Plaut
The Science: Creates computational models that adapt and learn
The Moral Danger: Just one word - Skynet.

The Scientist: Sheldon Cohen
The Science: Identifying factors that predict health and well-being
The Moral Danger: Some of the people Dr. Cohen helps with his research might turn out to be criminals. Healthier muggers can run away faster and steal more purses and wallets.

The Scientist: David Rakison
The Science: In charge of a lab studying infant development
The Moral Danger: Giving students instructions may teach them that it’s okay to obey British people. This could lead America to return to British monarchy, violating everything Founding Fathers stood for.
Competition to be Most Popular Male Assistant Professor Heats Up

For many years, Erik Thiessen was undoubtedly the most popular (also: only) male assistant professor in the department. However, now that J. David Creswell and Charles Kemp have arrived, the title is up in the air.

Thiessen has responded by wearing sunglasses. He says his research shows that they make him up to 63% cooler.

[Ed. note: Thiessen has had some difficulty getting this research published in a peer reviewed journal]

Whereas J. David has taken the opportunity to let it be known that he’s close friends with the lead guitarist of popular band Maroon 5, and can arrange photos with them whenever he likes.

In the face of rivals with this much star power, Charles Kemp’s attempt to bribe voters with pizza may not be sufficient. Unless he can produce a picture of himself hanging out with Paul Hogan, it may be checkmate for Charles Kemp.
For the second time in recent history, a faculty member has decided to leave the Feeney Wing of Baker Hall. Kevin Pelphrey will be following Peggy Clark to Yale. Indeed, Kevin and Peggy were in the very same office, right across from Brooke Feeney.

According to unnamed sources in the Pelphrey lab, Kevin was disturbed by a series of spooky occurrences in the area around his office, including eerie moaning noises, frightening creaks, and menacingly whispering voices.

The unnamed source said that the final tipping point came when members of the lab saw what may have been a ghost - a figure in a white sheet moving up and down the hall. Accompanied by a smaller figure, also in a white sheet, trotting beside it. Possibly some sort of ghost puppy?

Brooke Feeney, who shared the wing with Kevin, was not around at the time of the ghost sighting. With Kevin’s departure, she will be able to expand into the vacant offices in the wing. When asked about the series of occurrences, Brooke had no comment.

Seriously, though, the PLB wishes Kevin all the best at Yale. Since Kevin is a big fan of *The Simpsons*, the PLB likes to imagine that Yale’s recruiting pitch to him went something like this:

[Click image to play]
September’s Graduate Student of the Month is Liz Carter. We talked about the advice she’d give young graduate students, what it’s like to complete a degree at several different departments, and why she likes Carnegie Mellon so much. Even the non-PLB parts of the place.

PLB: Tell us a little about your past.
LC: I grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut, which is a suburb of New York City. I lived there my whole childhood, and then I went to Yale, which was actually only 25 miles away.

PLB: Were you a psychology major at Yale?
LC: Yes, I was in the behavioral neurosciences track of psychology. Actually my undergrad advisor left there recently, which is the job that Kevin’s taking.

PLB: What did you do after Yale?
LC: After Yale, I was in San Diego. I got a Masters Degree at UCSD. Then I went to North Carolina. I left San Diego in December (of 2004), and I started working for Kevin as part of his staff in January at UNC. I was applying for PhD programs, and so I applied to both UNC and to Duke, just to see what would happen, and wound up enrolling at Duke. It was a bit of an adventure, but it worked out.

PLB: You’re hoping to finish your dissertation this year. How have you managed to stay on track to graduate with all of these moves?
LC: I figured out what I wanted thanks to the Masters. Or at least, I figured out what I didn’t want! And then I got an eight-month head start in the PhD program by working in Kevin’s lab as staff, so I already knew my way around the lab when I started.

PLB: Was it a tough decision to stay here, and not move with Kevin to Yale, especially since Yale is your alma mater?
LC: I like you guys. I really do like it here. You guys really keep track of your graduate students; you’re the best at making sure people actually graduate, and do things like make sure people have committee meetings. The fact that you know we exist, and you’re trying to get us out is good!

PLB: How will you keep the research going in Kevin’s absence?
LC: He’s going to be coming back a lot. Once you start projects on a particular scanner, you can’t change scanners. Even if it’s the same brand, same strength, people always stick to the one they started on. So there are going to be a lot of us staying here, actually, just tying up loose ends. Most of the lab will be here for at least a few more months.

PLB: What is your dissertation about?
LC: I’m interested in how people understand others’ intentions, and what happens when people fail to fulfill their intentions. So I’m going to have people watching animated clips of humans and humanoid robots and other machines reaching for various objects. And they might change their mind – set out toward one object, and then set out toward another. Or they might keeping going toward the same object and miss. I want to look at how people’s brains respond when watching other people do that, because people can change their mind, versus watching a machine, which generally can’t. Unless you’re in a science fiction movie. Eventually I want to look at it in individuals with and without autism, because those with autism tend to have various difficulties comparing people versus machines or other objects; people just don’t seem to be a special entity to them.
PLB: Since you are an elder graduate student now, wise in the ways of science, what advice would you have for the young ones in the program?
LC: I would tell them that every university has free therapy for its students. Because at some point, everybody gets stressed, everyone gets upset, and not everyone knows that there are resources available to them. That was actually advice given to me by a friend who’s now a faculty member.

PLB: As you look back on your graduate student career, what was the highest high? Or the lowest low? Or even the creamiest middle?
LC: I think it’s probably actually the same thing, the highest high and the lowest low. Which is realizing, when I was in San Diego, that I was not doing the right research for me. It was simultaneously bad, because it was scary, and very liberating. Because as one of my friends said to me, “You don’t HAVE to stay here. If this isn’t the research you want to do, you don’t have to do it.”

PLB: Well, it’s good that you were able to survive that! Let’s switch gears and talk about what you do for fun. When you’re not doing research, what are you doing to entertain yourself?
LC: I rock climb. Mostly indoor right now. And I do yoga, and I’ve started taking ballroom dance classes. I guess most of the time when I’m not here, I’m trying to engage in physical activities to make up for sitting in front of the computer.

PLB: Do you have any favorite restaurants or other hang outs in Pittsburgh?
LC: I do like eating; I’m not going to lie. I especially enjoy outdoor eating, which is very good in Pittsburgh during the summer. I do try to consult Erika’s dining webpage as frequently as possible.

PLB: All right. Now we’re to the traditional end of the interview. The Three Tough Questions. I believe you already know the first one: what, for you, is the big question you want to answer with your research?
LC: I want to cure autism. If I’m going to be answering lofty questions, I might as well go all out. I think, through a combination of genetics, behavioral, and brain research, we can figure it out.

PLB: OK, that’s the spirit. Go for the gusto. Number two: If you weren’t a graduate student, what would you be doing?
LC: In college, I did construction for Habitat for Humanity. I’d probably still be doing that. My specialty was framing and sheetrock. Although there’s a lot to be said for demolition; demolition can be good fun.

PLB: Excellent. Well then, here is the final Tough Question: If you could breed any two animals together to create a new super-animal, what would they be, and what would the offspring be?
LC: Is this a new question? That’s not fair! Hmmm. I think I’d breed a Newfoundland dog with a black bear, to make a very large and furry creature. Big enough to be useful for pulling large things, but also nice and furry, good to cuddle up with in winter. Just think of how intimidating you’d be walking down the street with him.
After years of on and off negotiations, Nutty the squirrel announced that the United Squirrel party was breaking off talks with CMU Professor Ken Kotovsky. Nutty cited the numerous unprovoked attacks by Dr. Kotovsky, resulting in hundreds of his countrysquirrels being forcibly moved to the South Side. “It is a myth that the South Side is livable” Nutty said. “There is a general lack of Oak Trees, too much traffic, and the residual chemical residue from the steel factories. Many of my cousins have been run over while waiting in line at one of the fancy overpriced restaurants.. The culture is also quite questionable”, he said. “They tried to placate us with loud rock and roll concerts, but it just hurt our ears”. “Let’s not forget the lines of drunk people urinating on the few trees we have”.

Kotovsky cited what he called an “unprovoked” recent squirrel attack on the home of his colleague Dr. Robert Siegler as the primary reason for increasing the number who have been forced to immigrate. In a break in, Siegler was robbed of every nut in the house, but the squirrel (who was unarmed) didn’t make it out alive. Nutty denied that the United Squirrels had anything to do with the attack. Nutty has long claimed that “Squirrel Hill” is the rightful homeland of all Pittsburgh squirrels irrespective of size or color, and that Kotovsky is an interloper.

In a decision in the city courts, the judge declared that squirrels have no property or civil rights in Squirrel Hill homeland or not. Nutty has called the judge’s decision bogus, and has appealed it to the state supreme court. Interestingly, the housing costs on the South Side have risen with each squirrel immigration. An unnamed CMU Professor living on the South Side (disclosure: edits this rag) was heard to say that “the squirrels add substantially to the diversity of the neighborhood, we are glad to have them”. When these data were presented to Kotovsky, he said, “of course, they improve the South Side, as did the raccoon immigration of 2003”.

Kotovsky/Squirrel Peace Summit
Breaking Report

Squirrels Reject Kotovsky’s Offer
PLB Squirrel Correspondent: Sheldon Cohen

Photo taken by Ken Kotovsky at time of most recent claimed squirrel attack. The squirrels dispute the validity of the photo, and claim it has been photoshopped.

Kotovsky cited what he called an “unprovoked” recent squirrel attack on the home of his colleague Dr. Robert Siegler as the primary reason for increasing the number who have been forced to immigrate. In a break in, Siegler was robbed of every nut in the house, but the squirrel (who was unarmed) didn’t make it out alive. Nutty denied that the United Squirrels had anything to do with the attack. Nutty has long claimed that “Squirrel Hill” is the rightful homeland of all Pittsburgh squirrels irrespective of size or color, and that Kotovsky is an interloper.

In a decision in the city courts, the judge declared that squirrels have no property or civil rights in Squirrel Hill homeland or not. Nutty has called the judge’s decision bogus, and has appealed it to the state supreme court. Interestingly, the housing costs on the South Side have risen with each squirrel immigration. An unnamed CMU Professor living on the South Side (disclosure: edits this rag) was heard to say that “the squirrels add substantially to the diversity of the neighborhood, we are glad to have them”. When these data were presented to Kotovsky, he said, “of course, they improve the South Side, as did the raccoon immigration of 2003”.

Why don't you come over here
and say that??

The squirrels’ response to Ken’s claims have not been entirely civil.
Department Celebrates Mike Scheier’s Decision to Take One for the Team

This button celebrates Mike’s second term as department head. Didn’t get one? Don’t worry - they’ll show up as PLB prizes

**FIVE MORE YEARS!**

**Carnegie Mellon Psychology**

Marcel, Ken, and John prepared for Mike’s arrival by memorizing the lyrics to Mike’s special song.

When Mike showed up, everyone serenaded him.

The two Davids lead the singing.

And despite hearing the department sing, several visitors stayed for lunch.