Psycho? Logical? Bulletin!

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Could the Plaid Brain become even more famouser?

Our staff here at PLB World Headquarters recently received the following e-mail from the Association for Psychological Science:

We are currently gathering information for a possible story in our monthly publication, the Observer, about psychology departments designing logos apart from their institution. We became aware that you ran the contest for the “plaid brain” logo design, and would like some more details, particularly regarding why the department chose to design its own logo. Also, we are searching for other university psychology departments that have their own logo; would you be able to direct us to any? Thank you for your time and any help you can give us.

If the Observer decided to run an article, expect sales of the plaid brain t-shirt to skyrocket; you might want to snap them up now. While the PLB is not a licensed financial advisor, investing in plaid brain t-shirts could be smarter than buying stocks. Or at least warmer.

PLB Shout-Out

This month’s PLB Shout Out goes to Theresa Kurutz, for her work on putting together the course schedule for the spring. It’s a bit like putting together a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzles, except the pieces have strong and constantly changing opinions about where they ought to fit. For example, I couldn’t decide whether I wanted to teach in the morning or afternoon for days at a time. Despite all of this, Theresa managed to put together a schedule on time that doesn’t force the undergrads (or me) to wake up at 6 AM. So thanks, Theresa!

Scheduling Advisory

The PLB will not come out on December 1st, since December is the day of the Holiday Party, and I want to put pics from said party into the December edition.

So: be sure to come to the Holiday Party!
The PLB has just received this urgent announcement:

Are you the sort of scientist who taps her toes while working in the laboratory? You look like you’re crunching data over there on the computer, but you’re actually browsing 1980s music videos on YouTube. In fact, doesn’t your entire scientific career feel like one big dance, like Pina Bausch’s Rite of Spring, the Village People doing YMCA, or maybe Michael Jackson dancing with zombies in Thriller, depending on your mood?

Those who saw the results of the first-ever Dance Your Ph.D. contest know that the human body is an excellent medium for communicating science -- perhaps not as data-rich as a peer-reviewed article but far more exciting. Since then, e-mails have poured in from scientists around the world asking how they can take part in the next event.

For this year’s contest, the stage is much larger and the prize is far grander. Rather than a single event in a single place, the dance is global.

1. Make a video of your own Ph.D. dance.
2. Post the video on YouTube.
3. Not later than 23:00 EST 16 November 2008, e-mail your name, the title of your Ph.D. thesis, and the video URL link to: gonzo@aaas.org.

Once this information is posted on the Dance Contest home page, you are officially entered in the contest. On 17 November 2008, a total of four winners will be chosen from the following categories:

- **Graduate Student**: Best among those currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program
- **Postdoc**: Best among those who have a Ph.D. but not tenure
- **Professor**: Best among those with Ph.D. and tenure
- **Popular Choice**: The video with the highest YouTube view count by the deadline

The Prize: On 17 November 2008, you will provide a single peer-reviewed research article on which you are a co-author. (Graduate students who have not yet co-authored an article must choose one from their Ph.D. adviser.) You will be paired with a professional choreographer. Over the next couple of weeks (via e-mail and telephone), you must help your choreographer understand your article, its aims, the hypotheses it tests, and its big-picture context. Then the four choreographers will collaborate to create a single four-part dance based on the winning research articles. Finally, you will be an honored guest at the AAAS Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois, where, on 13 February 2009, you will have front-row seats to the world debut of the output -- THIS IS SCIENCE -- a contemporary dance interpretation of contemporary scientific research. Accommodation in Chicago will be provided, and grants are available for travel expenses.

For full details of the contest, visit www.gonzolabs.org.

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**Some thoughts on possible departmental submissions:**

**Brooke Feeney**  
*The Dance*: tango  
*Relation to science*: Every now and then, during lifts, Brooke drops whoever she’s dancing with. This demonstrates the importance of a supportive partner.

**Lori Holt**  
*The Dance*: Ballet  
*Relation to science*: Lori doesn’t actually dance. Instead, she has a troupe of trained gerbils perform the Nutcracker.

**Marcel Just**  
*The Dance*: Personalized version of the macarena - the Marcelrena!  
*Relation to science*: During a portion of the dance, Marcel’s left side and his right side are out of synch, just like brain regions of adults with autism.

**David Rakison**  
*The Dance*: Removes pants, dances around in briefs like Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch.  
*Relation to science*: Tenuous. Rakison is just generally pro-Mark Wahlberg, anti-pants.
There have been a number of interesting talks given to - and by - members of the department in recent weeks; this feature highlights a few of them.

Ashley Reid, an undergraduate working in Brooke Feeney’s lab, gave a talk on her research at the homecoming gala on October 24th. Her research was about how people grow through attachment - that is, how relationships with others facilitate versus hinder goal strivings and accomplishment.

Hopefully, alums are so attached to seeing research like this done that they’ll strive to donate huge chunks of cash.

Alyx Kronstein, an undergraduate working in Erik Thiessen’s lab, went to Harrisburg to present a poster about her research at the state capitol. She met with Representatives Frankel and Wheatley, and many other legislative leaders who stopped by at the poster session in the East Rotunda. Alyx and the other students at the session were recognized by the Speaker of the House.

They also received a congratulatory e-mail from President Cohon, meaning Alyx has received one more of those than her advisor.

Laurie Santos Reminds Us: Monkeys are Dumb

Laurie Santos presented some of her research at the first department colloquium in living memory, focusing on evidence of primate irrationality.

The provocative address lead to days of discussion on the adaptiveness of irrationality and its origins. And also lead to a strange hunger for fluff tacos.

Sternberg on Sternberg

Bob Sternberg gave a talk to the Developmental Discussion Group demonstrating that Bob Sternberg is the pre-eminent expert on Bob Sternberg-related phenomena.

The career retrospective spanned his early days in research, his insights into doing good science, and his move to deanship. The talk resulted from an overwhelming vote in favor of hearing some tips of the trade from an experienced professor.
The good news for squirrel hunters this fall is that squirrel populations are booming, according to the Pennsylvania Game Commission field officer reports. That’s due in part to last fall’s mast production. Acorns were abundant, so squirrels entered last winter well-fed, sassy and healthy. Fox and gray squirrels mate early, usually in January. About 45 days later in mid-March, three or four naked, blind, helpless pups are born. Young squirrels grow slowly. Eyes open at about four weeks, and pups finally leave the nest when about 10 to 12 weeks old in mid-June.

If the adults were well fed the previous fall, they produce a second litter in late August or September. This explains why squirrels are so abundant right now.

Though the diet and the reproductive biology of fox and gray squirrels are similar, there are striking differences between these two species. Gray squirrels are the more widespread species, common in dense deciduous forests, backyards, and city parks statewide. They are easily recognized by the white-tipped tail hairs that give the tail a “frosted” appearance.

Fox squirrels, twice the size of grays at about 2 pounds, are the largest tree squirrels in North America. The head is dark, the body brownish orange, and the bushy tail is dark, not frosted.

Fox squirrels prefer open woods with a sparse understory; gray squirrels favor heavier woods with a well-developed understory.

Though relatively common in Western Pennsylvania, fox squirrels are rare or absent from the central and northeastern parts of the state.

Fox squirrels are also behaviorally distinct from grays. They spend more time on the ground, move more slowly with a loping gait, and stop frequently to search for food and sniff the air for danger.

Sheldon Cohen’s Delicous Squirrel and Yam Pie Recipe

Ingredients:
1 large (red) squirrel or 2 small (grey) squirrels
2 large Yams
2 Cups of Butter
1/2 cup low fat sour cream
1/2 cup raisins
Pie crust (make or buy)

Mash the squirrel(s) with fur and everything into a large bowl. Mash the yams in with the squirrel(s) and mix. Melt the butter and add it with the low fat sour cream and the raisins. Mix it all thoroughly. Put mixture into pie crust and bake (in preheated oven) at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Serve with whipped cream or chocolate ice cream.

Editorial Footnotes
1. I tried to come up with a joke about squirrel hunting that would be more humorous than the concept itself. This endeavor met with failure.

2. Squirrels are nature’s Ken Kotovsky. Scientists speculate that this is why they’re bitter enemies.

3. And of course, squirrel pups are nature’s assistant professors.


5. Ken Kotovsky.

6. May not actually be delicious.

7. In these hard economic times, that’s a meal on a budget. Plus, you won’t need to cook for guests ever again after the first time you serve it at a dinner party.
November’s Graduate Student of the Month is Valentinos Zachariou. He talks about why Pittsburgh is a step up from Indiana, but a tiny bit less cool than Toronto.

[Editor’s Note: GSotM interview and writing duties have been taken over by new PLB Associate Editor/Gopher, J. David Creswell]

DC: I’d like to start out by asking you some general questions, where are you from?
VZ: I usually say that I’m Greek. Then I also mention that I come from Cyprus, but that confuses people, because they say “where is Cyprus?”, and I say that it is an island off the coast of Greece. It’s a different country, but nevertheless, I am Greek. And I also am from Cyprus, so that answers your first question.

DC: So what was it like growing up in Cyprus?
VZ: Warm... actually, strike that out, recently it’s hot. Even this late in the winter it’s hot, in the 95 degree Fahrenheit range even this late. I usually Skype with my parents and friends there, and I’m usually wearing my coat and in the background it is snowing, and they are sitting at the beach. Well, what to do?

DC: Hmmm, and why did you pick Pittsburgh?
VZ: I didn’t pick Pittsburgh, actually. I picked Canada. I was heading to the University of Toronto, and while I was heading there with my luggage Marlene said, no, back to Pittsburgh! I said okay, well okay. I really like Toronto, the city is much more European, you know, you fit in more. I’d already been here in Indiana for six years, and I was getting a bit bored of the scene, and then I was almost there! I almost managed to get away, but no, back to the US.

DC: So you did your undergraduate work in Indiana?
VZ: Yes, my undergraduate work was done in Indiana, I was, I still am, an electrical engineer. I also completed an extra major in psychology, and I decided to follow psychology. Applied engineering helped my psychology, so I didn’t go into the theoretical parts of engineering by pursuing a graduate degree in the field. I thought (and I still think) psychology is a good venue for engineering applications.

DC: So how does someone from Cyprus end up in Indiana?
VZ: I was basically following the footsteps of my cousin who also studied at Purdue University in Indiana. I went to an English-speaking high school in Cyprus, and so I ended up choosing between schools in England and the US, and I decided to come to the US because the way they teach in the US was more appealing to me.

DC: What is your research about?
VZ: I am interested and study biological motion. In particular, I explore biological motion as a scenario for binding the two commonly referred visual streams together in working interaction. The literature indicates they should be two different systems, so basically I do classic tasks that engage the dorsal and ventral visual streams in the presence of biological motion. I design my own stimuli varying how biological they are, and I’m trying to see if under those conditions I get interactions or even any facilitation or hindrance in how those areas process or if they seem to be processing better.
DC: Has your CMU experience been what you expected?
VZ: Actually, I didn’t know what to expect from CMU. This is one of the top schools in the country, and you have high expectations that everything is going to be top notch, and then, you know, to some extent it is, and to some others, not so much.

DC: So in most areas it’s been an extreme disappointment?
VZ: Yeah, ha ha ha. Mostly I’m happy, I have no complaints, I do my work and it’s fine.

DC: Do you like living in Pittsburgh?
VZ: No, I hate it. I hate it, I can’t emphasize that enough. Can you bold that? I’ll tell you why, because of the unpredictability of the weather, I hate that, and I also hate the roads. Every month or so I have to spend $500 on car repairs because of Pittsburgh roads. So I don’t know if I’m going to stay here long after I graduate, I have my suitcase packed, I just want to be ready.

DC: Are there places where you go here in Pittsburgh to take the edge off?
VZ: I go to the Sharp Edge, and that usually takes the edge off. They have great beers from Greece there, so I do enjoy myself there sometimes. I’ve also been going to the gym recently as a way to vent off. Of course meeting new people, more international people. One thing that’s good about Pittsburgh is that you can keep yourself busy if you want, there’s always something to do.

DC: I would now like to turn to some last important questions. First, what do you think of the Greek liquor “Ouzo”?
VZ: You cannot get enough of it because usually it’s served in very small glasses, and I wish they would serve it in much bigger glasses.

DC: What do you mean, like 16 ounce glasses?
VZ: That would be more appropriate.

DC: Next question, what is the big question you would like to answer in your research career?
VZ: In my research career? Well initially it’s, where can I get a job? And the next one is, when can I retire?

DC: I don’t know if they qualify as “big questions”
VZ: Well I guess if you want to go a bit bigger, then I think it would be to understand one mechanism in the brain from beginning to the end. I would feel a sense of accomplishment if I knew at least that much.

DC: Okay, one more big question. Have you ever eaten at a pizza place called Valentinos?
VZ: No, I haven’t. If you know about it you should give me the phone number, because it sounds interesting.

DC: We actually have a lot of them in Nebraska where I grew up. I thought maybe there was a common connection on that one, damn. Well, anyway, the pizza is delicious, a bit salty, but delicious.
VZ: When I open my restaurant, I’ll keep that in mind.

DC: Thanks for your time Valentino, that was fun.
The October meeting of the Faculty Senate featured the annual address by the President Cohon. The President primarily discussed two issues: freshmen class stats and CMU’s state of financial affairs. To avoid boring you with a lengthy report, I will summarize the address in bullet points.

**Freshmen class stats**
* Similar to the past 10 year, only 23% of the students we admitted chose to attend CMU.
* Similar to the previous years, the proportion of minority students is still low – 12%.
* However, we have the highest proportion of foreign students in our peer group – also 12%.
* The proportion of women is 43%, which in words of the President is “a huge increase” from 2007 (39%).

**CMU’s finances**
* At the moment of the meeting (10/16/2008) CMU was doing “reasonably well” given that the economic crisis is “scary”. *
* The bulk of CMU’s debt (375,000,000) is in the form of Variable Rate Demand Bonds.
* Interest rates for these bonds are re-set daily.
* Before the crisis, interest rates varied between 1-2%; however rates spiked during the crisis, reaching the highest rate on September 23rd – 9.5%.
* According to the President, CMU will be OK if there are no more spikes in the interest rates of Variable Rate Demand Bonds.
* News that should comfort everyone: at the moment of the meeting the President did not see it necessary to implement “drastic measures” such as hiring freezes or salary cuts.
* More good news: CMU’s financial gurus had the foresight to get our money out of the mortgage-backed securities in the Spring of 2007. Universities that did not do this (e.g., Penn State) have liquidity problems as a result.
* Not so good news: CMU’s largest sources of revenue are tuition (296,000,000) and sponsored projects (36,000,000).
  * It is not clear whether people will still be able to afford the tuition that CMU charges.
  * It is unclear at what level research will be funded by the government in the years ahead, but it does not look good at the moment.
  * CMU has impeccable timing with regards to launching its capital campaigns – the last one co-occurred with the dot-com bust, this one (launched on 10/24) co-occurred with a crisis of an even larger magnitude.

**Odds and Ends**
In addition to the President’s address, the senators also heard from Elizabeth Vaughan, Coordinator of Student Activities. According to Elizabeth, there are 259 student organizations at CMU but only 101 of them have a faculty advisor. Therefore, all faculty were urged to consider becoming a faculty advisor to a student organization! You can be a content expert or a spiritual advisor if you happen to know next to nothing about the organization’s area of interest. For example, Erik Thiessen advises women’s lacrosse team, and we all know that Erik’s extent of knowledge about lacrosse is limited to a couple of viewings of American Pie. If you have an interest in becoming an advisor, you can contact Elizabeth Vaughan at eav@andrew.cmu.edu.

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**Editorial Footnotes**
1. Even after all this time, I don’t think Anna really gets the point of the Faculty Senate.
2. Does this mean that President Cohon was using air quotes?
3. “dot-bomb,” as my friends in Silicon Valley fondly refer to it.
4. And I’ve never even seen American Pie, which should give you an idea of the quality of advising I give the lacross team. Gems like “score more than the other team” are pretty common.
Staff Council Notes- August thru October, 2008

A big shout-out to everyone who’s helped me over the last few months after I broke my ankle, and had trouble getting around: Shellie Sherman for creatively finding me a temporary office to avoid all the stairs on the 3rd floor of Baker; Chris Lawson for graciously putting up with me and my many phone calls to recruit subjects; Erik Thiessen and Lynne Reder for helping me up said stairs before the move; Sheldon and Team Cohen for being so patient with me during the weeks I was out getting surgery & recovering (and for the flowers); and Wes Barnhart for cheerfully carting my stuff back and forth to my temporary office, running other errands for me, and unhooking and re-hooking up my computer for me. And thanks to all of you who with a few kind words have offered me moral support along the way.

I missed a few SC meetings as a result of my ankle and trouble getting around, so I’m unable to report on the juicy bits for those. The agenda for August’s meeting can be viewed here (it says “Minutes” but really, it’s only an agenda). September’s minutes can be downloaded at this link (they aren’t yet on the SC website). October’s agenda is available from this one (the minutes haven’t been emailed to us yet for review). Most of the October meeting was taken up by the annual presentation by Ivy Ero of the Food Bank. The minutes for the July meeting (which I did attend) can be downloaded from here. Remember that you are welcome to attend any SC meeting; you just can’t vote (Schedule is on SC website).

For other SC members’ reporting on what SC does for you, check out our new quarterly SC newsletter at the SC website, http://www.cmu.edu/staff-council/ Click on Publications, then Quarterly Newsletter, for the inaugural issue. And stay caught up with SC by subscribing to its electronic b-board, official.staff-council (computer instructions are on the SC homepage).

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<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and Fitness</td>
<td>Wed, 11/5</td>
<td>UC Rangos</td>
<td>If you want a free shot, print out and bring the 1 page registration form from the CMU website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fitness Fair</td>
<td>11 AM - 4 PM</td>
<td>Ballroom</td>
<td>Bring the fair poster you got from campus mail to quickly enter all raffles.</td>
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<td>Bring canned food to enter another raffle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits Open Enrollment</td>
<td>11/3-11/17</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Packet should arrive at your home around 11/1. This year is NOT a dental/vision changes year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC Food Drive</td>
<td>11/3-11/14</td>
<td>Containers around campus</td>
<td>There will also be opportunities to donate at several campus events</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC Cans Across The Cut</td>
<td>Wed, 11/12</td>
<td>The Fence</td>
<td>Register your team by going to the SC website (link) and clock on Register (in the Upcoming Events Section)</td>
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