There will be a quiz competition at this year’s Holiday Party (December 12th). Some things you should know about it:
- Teams of 6 (or so)
- There will be fantabulous prizes
- No, really, the prizes will be good

**Pulitzer-Winning PLB?**

Mike - I just stumbled on this page [the departments picture archive] and it looks pretty pathetic: as if we haven’t had any fun in 5 years. Perhaps we could replace it with a link to the PLB?
- David Klahr

Is it possible that the PLB is, how do I put this, too irreverent for center stage like that?
- Mike Scheier

Mike. The PLB and its Pulitzer Prize beg to differ.

Although, now that I look at the statue, I guess it IS the Pulitzer Prize for Irreverence.
- PLB Editor

As revealed in series of e-mails received at the PLB World Headquarters, published here for the first time
Results of the “Third Name” Poll

Last month, the PLB posted a poll to help give Anna and Ken some advice on what the ‘third name’ of their baby should be. You voted, and the results are in.

There were a lot of good choices. Luka and Leia Koedinger were popular. And there were some great write-in suggestions, such as “Brit Favre Koedinger” and “Lothar-Ann Koedinger.”

But there was also an overwhelming favorite. So it is time to say hello, everyone, to: Jerusalem Isabella ‘Badger’ Koedinger

Anna and Ken welcomed little baby Badger into the world on November 23rd.

Baby Pool Winner: Erika JCL Taylor, with a guess of November 27th, was the closest entrant. Erika, you have won a round-trip, all expenses paid ticket to... The PLB’s world headquarters in Baker Hall 335G! Once there, you can claim a prize.

Faculty Senate Report

Apparently, all kinds of interesting things happened at the last Faculty Senate Meeting, because Senator Fisher filed the following detailed report about the deliberations of the Faculty Senate:
Congratulations to the new members of the CMU chapter of Psi Chi, the national honor society of Psychology, who were inducted last month!

Psi Chi officers Jess Jankowitsch, Gabe Smith, Jen Fillo, and Brent Fiore conducted the ceremony.

Sheldon Cohen and Erik Thiessen provided inspiring rhetoric.
December’s Graduate Student of the Month is Bryan Matlen. Bryan is distinguished both by being a faithful reader of the PLB, and by currently sitting at first place in the department’s official fantasy football league (yes, even ahead of Brooke Feeney). I wanted to chat with Bryan before Brooke takes her inevitable vengeance upon him.

PLB: Congratulations as being chosen Graduate Student of the Month.
BM: It’s an honor. I’m a big reader of the PLB.

PLB: Excellent, excellent. If you continue to flatter the PLB, I’ll make sure that your profile in the PLB turns out well. Let’s start by talking about your past – where you’re from, where you were an undergrad, all of that.
BM: I was born in Long Beach, CA, and then I grew up in Sacramento. I went to undergrad at UC-Davis, which is about 30 minutes from Sacramento. I started out interested in two things: journalism, and children’s learning. I felt more fulfilled working with children’s learning, so I chose to study psychology. Journalism is cool [Editor’s Note: Yes, yes it is.], but I just felt like I could make more of a difference doing psychology. Children’s learning was a better fit for me.

PLB: What drew you to CMU?
BM: I was deciding between Minnesota and here. The PIER program was a big draw and I was also really interested in children’s ability to reason from known to novel domains; analogical reasoning and induction. It also really came down to, I had a good gut feeling about here.

PLB: How have your first few months of grad school treated you?
BM: They’ve been amazing. I like the people, I like the department, and the PLB of course! The people have been really welcoming and friendly. I was initially a little scared, because of CMU’s stereotype, of only caring about publications. But people have been really nice and I’m enjoying the research I’m doing.

PLB: What kind of research are you doing?
BM: I’m working with 4- and 5-year-olds. With Anna, I’m doing a project to see how attractive but irrelevant information can distract children from their knowledge of synonyms when they make inductions. With David, I’m interested in seeing whether generation of analogies, can facilitate children’s understanding of the deep structure of a problem, as opposed to the surface structure.

PLB: What’s it like to have two advisors, rather than just one?
BM: It’s nice, because I get two different styles of advising: Anna’s real hands-on, and David gives me a lot of freedom to do what I want, and I appreciate both. I like it because it allows me to study not only induction, but analogical reasoning. Having two research projects has some advantages. As a first year, you worry that your projects are going to flop. So, two gives me a backup in case one of the projects doesn’t go as I plan! Both Anna and David have been very encouraging of my other projects and I feel comfortable with having both of them as advisors.
PLB: What do you do in your spare time?
BM: When I got here, I wanted to find a hobby. I’ve always wanted to play the violin, so I started taking lessons over at the University of Pittsburgh. Right now, I suck! But ask me in two years. I watch football, of course, to stay on top of my fantasy team. Sometimes I go work out. I used to be on a floor hockey team, with some of the people in the history department, and SDS. But we lost in the playoffs, so we’re out.

PLB: What do you think of Pittsburgh? It’s a bit of a change from California.
BM: I like snow. Maybe I’m kind of a naïve Californian, and people think I’m crazy, but I like snow. Pittsburgh is a cool city. There’s a lot of history to it. I come from Sacramento, and I feel like Sacramento is a bit more townish. Pittsburgh is a city, but it’s not a metropolis like New York. Pittsburgh is a nice blend. You get the city, but it’s not overcrowded.

PLB: You’ve taken over first place in the fantasy football league, surpassing Brooke “Juggernaut” Feeney. To what do you attribute your success?
BM: I don’t want to rub it in! Most of my success is probably due to, I’d have to say, Beginner’s Luck. It’s worked so far. I’m just hoping it lasts! It’s a very honorable position to be ahead of Brooke. She got the McCandless professorship — congratulations to her. I think being ahead of her in fantasy football is almost equally prestigious.

PLB: Imagine that the tall, skinny, cup of coffee you’re holding can contain 200 millileters of coffee. Further, imagine that it currently contains 100 millileters. The second Tough Question is a two-part Piagetian Question. First, is the glass half-full, or half-empty? Second, if you poured the contents of the tall skinny cup into a short, round glass, would that second glass now also be half full or half empty?
BM: Oh, man, these are tough ones. I think it would depend on the goal. If the glass contained bad tasting medicine, and you wanted to drink it, then the positive thing would be to say that it’s half empty, so that’s what I’d say. But if it contained a drink I really liked, then I’d say that it’s half full. In terms of pouring it into the second, round glass, ah, I don’t know. I’ve never tried that! I see why you call these the 3 tough questions now.

PLB: What would you be doing, right now, if you weren’t a graduate student.
BM: Well, I think I’d be some kind of writer. I’ve always enjoyed writing stories. I’d probably be either something like a journalist, or a short-story writer. I’d be getting paid maybe even less than I am now, but those are still noble professions, studying children’s learning was just a better fit for me.
Notes from your Staff Council Rep
November 2007

This month:
--Mascot
--SC elections changes
--Food Drive update
--Staff Satisfaction Survey

At the November meeting, Staff Council saw an illustration of the new mascot that will soon be appearing on Tshirts and sweatshirts near you! Personally, I think the design has the profile of a bearded horse, but it’s certainly better than the current mascot (nada). Some SC reps helped choose our new mascot. It reminds me of the little black dog whom I often see walking its owners (an older couple) across campus early in the mornings. I have to pet that dog when I see him. I’ve crossed busy roads to do so. It’s a highlight of my trek in to work.

At the next election (mid 2008), Staff Council will be rejiggering the way it elects reps. Specifically, for future elections at least 2 reps must be elected from each CMU division, as depicted in the CMU phone book. There’ll also be a limited number of at-large reps (who can originate from any division). If nobody volunteers from a particular division, the division head gets to gently prod someone(s) to serve. The current concern is that some divisions are wildly overrepresented, while others have no reps. There has also been talk of term limits, but there was no discussion of that at the last meeting. Not sure where we are on that change.

The Food Drive updated us on their results, which were solid again this year. Food collected in terms of pounds was the 3rd largest ever. It’s a tremendous amount of work, both getting the word out and collecting from sites all over campus, so their committee is to be commended.

I’m on the Communications and Benefits Committees. In the last few months, the Staff Satisfaction Survey that CMU invited us to complete online back in 2005 has been a topic of discussion in both committees. With its introduction on the agenda to the main meeting in November, it’s become a topic of more widespread concern. The major concerns are as follows: Results are only now beginning to dribble out to campus, in piecemeal fashion, distributed through HR. The data were compiled by an entity that is not entirely independent of CMU. The decision to release the results of your division rests solely with the division head. This presents, unfortunately, the means and incentive to suppress results suggesting poorer morale or working conditions in a particular department, relative to CMU as a whole. There have been no campuswide publications yet with even basic averaged data, that I am aware of. And so on. There’ll be another Staff Satisfaction Survey in roughly 3 years. I suspect that many SC reps will have a hard time recommending that staff take the time to complete the survey again, unless these practices are refined, and the openness and timeliness of communications about results made subject to improvements.

Thank you to those of you who attended the recent Open Forum with President Cohon. The SC Communications Committee, on which I sit, coordinated that event and, as always, it’s especially rewarding to see a great turnout… and particularly from people with whom I work!

There is no meeting in December. Happy Holidays everyone, and check back in 2008’s PLBs!
People frequently ask the PLB, “What area group is Professor X in? He does a bit of cognitive work, but also a bit of developmental work,” or a question along those lines. To which I reply, “Professor X is an imaginary person featured in comic books, and to my knowledge, he is not employed at CMU.”

However, one is forced to admit that our current area group structure can be a bit confusing, especially for people not used to it. At the department retreat, the PLB began to gather ideas about how we could clarify the area group structure, and make it more obvious.

Some people suggested adding area groups, like a “Perception” group, or a “Cognitive Neuroscience” group. But no matter how specific our area groups might be, there’s still a possibility of people fitting into more than one.

So, as a public service, the PLB is proposing an entirely novel area group classification. I believe it will be the first of its kind, anywhere in the nation. It has the advantage of being completely unambiguous.

Area Group One: People the PLB can lift. Members include faculty like Brooke, Anna Fisher, Charles Kemp, and so forth.

Area Group Two: People the PLB can NOT lift. Members include faculty like Kevin, Ken Kotovsky, and Mike Scheier.

Clearly, there are still some details to work out. As Kevin noted, someone like Marcel might abruptly change area groups if the PLB starts working out. But I think we can all agree that this classification system is much simpler, and unfailingly accurate.
Congratulations to Erin Ingvalson and John Dawson, who were married at the St. Paul Cathedral in Pittsburgh on November 3rd.

Erin was the first TA I ever had at CMU (for Developmental Research Methods), and she ruled over the undergrads in my course with an iron fist.

The PLB has not yet been able to ascertain whether she employs the same leadership style with John.