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**“Early Categorization: What is the Mechanism and
What Develops?”**

Monday, November 14, 2011

4:30-6:00 pm

A53 Baker Hall/Steinberg Auditorium

People are remarkably smart: they use language, possess intricate motor skills, make non-trivial inferences, develop and use scientific theories, devise laws, and adapt to complex dynamic environments. Nevertheless, they do not exhibit evidence of these abilities at birth. Therefore, one of the most interesting and exciting challenges in the study of human cognition is to gain an understanding of how people acquire knowledge in the course of development and learning. A critical component of the acquisition of new knowledge is the ability to form general categories, which enables organisms to creatively use existing knowledge in new situations by generalizing from the familiar to the novel. The ability is fundamental for conceptual development, and concepts are central to human intelligence. In this talk, I will focus on three major questions: Where does the ability to categorize start? How is this ability achieved? And what develops? I argue that, in general, the starting point is unsupervised learning of highly redundant categories and the main developmental achievements are (1) the ability to selectively attend to relevant information, while ignoring irrelevant and (2) the ability to use words to guide category learning.

*All lectures are open to the public.
For more information, call 412-268-3151.*