Psychology News

Message from the Chair

This fall brings exciting news: the new Intermountain Neuroimaging Consortium (INC) is up and running. The brain-scanning magnet is now installed and was formally dedicated on August 26th. Check out the photos of the installation in the centerfold where you’ll also find the link to our feature article on the subject. The field of psychology is undergoing a serious transformation. The ability to measure brain activity while a person is engaged in a variety of activities is enhancing our understanding of the neural basis for many psychological phenomena. One of the strengths of our department is that we have the expertise among the faculty in a diverse arsenal of techniques to simultaneously attack scientific problems using psychological, genetic, neuroscience, and computer simulation methods. The addition of brain scanning to the Boulder campus greatly strengthens our capacity to answer basic questions about human function. This enhanced understanding will in turn lead to effective interventions for a variety of problems: attention and memory; negative effects of stress; acute and chronic pain; addiction; and treatment of psychosis, depression and bipolar affective disorder. We do indeed live in exciting times.

On another note, I am delighted to announce the following personnel actions: Brett King, Diane Martichuski, Tina Pittman Wagers and Natalie Smutzler have been reappointed as Senior Instructors; Matt Jones and Matt Keller have been reappointed as Assistant Professors; Sona Dimidjian and Eliana Colunga have been promoted to Associate Professors with continuous tenure; and Don Cooper (already Associate Professor) has been awarded tenure. Finally, Jerry Rudy is now Associate Chair for Faculty Development, Teri Hernández has become Associate Chair for Graduate Education, and Natalie Smutzler is now Associate Chair for Undergraduate Education. Many, many thanks to Bernadette Park and Don Weatherley for their excellent service as Associate Chairs over the past years.

Let’s all have a satisfying and productive Fall semester.

—Law Harvey

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Understanding Marijuana Use

When Professor Tiffany Ito was in college, she initially enrolled in psychology because it fulfilled a course requirement, but it turned out to be “by far the most interesting class [she] took.” She found that in biologically-oriented psychology classes made the most sense to her, but she realized that she did not want to do research on non-human animals. Eventually she realized that there were some social psychologists who were “combining social topics with more physiological measures” in order to understand the neural mechanisms involved in the processing of social information. The kind of research that Dr. Ito started out being interested in has since evolved into its own discipline, referred to as “social neuroscience,” in which researchers explicitly try to use neural and physiological processes in order to understand social processes and also to understand the neural mechanisms that support those processes.

Her interest in social neuroscience is evident in the many research projects in which she is currently involved. For example, she is collaborating with department colleagues Angela Bryan, Erik Willcutt, Akira Miyake, Kent Hutchison, and David Allen from CU’s Department of Integrative Physiology, on a study related to adolescent marijuana use. They are trying to understand what influences people to decide to try marijuana, and once they’ve tried it, what influences them to either start using it more heavily or not. They are looking at many factors simultaneously, including genetic factors, neural processes, and social beliefs, trying to understand how they work together to affect decision making about drug use.

While the full study will take five years to complete, initial results already provide information about the factors that predict marijuana use. For instance, Dr. Ito and her colleagues found that executive functions – cognitive processes that control attention to produce goal-directed behavior – predict the initiation of marijuana use. Among students who had never used marijuana, those with lower executive function ability were found a year later to be more likely to have started using marijuana. Perceptions of use among peers also predict future marijuana use. Those who perceive their peers as more accepting of marijuana are more likely to increase their use within the subsequent year. They also found that the brains of heavy marijuana users react more strongly to marijuana-related stimuli than infrequent or non-users. Together, these results show many factors that affect the use of marijuana, or are affected by use. Future analyses will seek to understand how these factors work together and possibly influence each other. —Alyson Daily

Drug Addiction and the Brain

Professor Ryan Bachtell and his lab study how drug addiction affects the brain. They are particularly interested in the dopamine system; dopamine is a chemical in the brain that regulates drug use and addiction. As one continues to take drugs, the dopamine system changes and dopamine signals become stronger. Dr. Bachtell and his lab think that reducing the activity of this system might be beneficial in curbing relapse.

One of the ways that they have been looking to accomplish this is through another brain chemical, adenosine. Adenosine is considered a “neuromodulator” that has a variety of diverse effects, one of which is to reduce dopamine signals. Dr. Bachtell believes that by “turning on” the adenosine system, it can counteract the dopamine signaling and reduce relapse. Work by Casey O’Neill, a graduate student in the lab, has shown that stimulation of the adenosine receptors in the brain reduces drug relapse in their models of addiction. These studies, coupled with other work in Dr. Bachtell’s lab, may be of use in developing treatments to aid in preventing drug relapse. —Alyson Daily

The alumni newsletter for the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience is published biannually and distributed to all alumni.

Credits
Technical Support: Enric Miret, Jon Roberts
Printing: Dynamic Designs Printing
Mailing: Mail Graphics
Photos of Ann Wood: Courtesy of Nora Mena, Ann Wood
Photos of Jim Wilson: Courtesy of Jim Wilson
E-mail: psychologynews@colorado.edu
Website: http://psych.colorado.edu/alumni/

Fall 2011

The Colorado Department of Human Services honored Professor Theresa Hernández for her work helping Colorado recover from traumatic brain injury (TBI). They have established an annual Theresa Hernandez Traumatic Brain Injury Trust Fund Community Award (she will also be the first recipient). Dr. Hernández worked to help pass a 2002 statute establishing the Colorado Traumatic Brain Injury Trust Fund Program which has helped an estimated 4,000 people deal with the effects of TBI. For more information about the Colorado TBI Trust Fund, see http://thicoolorado.org/

The Fuller Award for best paper published in the journal Behavior Genetics during 2010 was presented to IBG Faculty Fellow, Matt Keller (pictured here), Sarah Medland of the Queensland Institute for Medical Research, and Laramie Duncan, graduate student in clinical psychology and the IBG graduate program. Their paper was titled, “Are Extended Twin Family Designs Worth the Trouble? A Comparison of the Bias, Precision, and Accuracy of Parameters Estimated in Four Twin Family Models.” The award was presented at the annual meeting of the Behavior Genetics Association in June 2011.

Professor Emeritus Update: Jim Wilson in Fruita, Colorado

Professor Emeritus James (Jim) Wilson retired from the department in 1997 after a long career at CU. Dr. Wilson was recruited from the University of California Berkeley by Dr. Jerry McClearn in 1966 as a Research Associate and completed his dissertation at CU. He assisted Dr. McClearn in writing proposals for the funding and founding of the Institute for Behavioral Genetics (IBG). He also helped plan the IBG building with its specific pathogen free mouse lab. Dr. Wilson’s initial research focused on hormones and the sexual habits of mice. He later switched species to study the effects of alcohol on humans. His research involved testing brothers (and later twins) before and after drinking and analyzing the differences in performance (“along with listening to their stories during the twenty-four hours I kept them in the lab to sober up!”). This research contributed to the development of a drug abuse research center on campus.

Dr. Wilson retired to a farm sheep outside of Fruita, Colorado, near Grand Junction on the western slope. He leases acreage to a Basque sheep farmer who raises the sheep while Dr. Wilson continues his teaching online. Since 1999, he has offered four sections per year of his course in Behavioral Genetics for the Integrative Biology Department at UC Denver. This summer, his class has a capacity of sixty students and has a wait list of fifty-three. With this popularity, it doesn’t seem that he can truly retire any time soon! —Kurt Bell

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Professor Sona Dimidjian has been chosen to receive one of the CU Proxmox’s Faculty Achievement Awards in October 2011. Dr. Dimidjian was chosen to receive this honor based, in part, on her influential paper entitled “How Would We Know if Psychotherapy Were Harmful?” which was published in the journal “American Psychologist” in 2010. She also received the CU-Boulder Graduate School’s Outstanding Faculty Graduate Advising Award in April 2011.

Post-doctoral fellow Tal Yarkoni was named a Rising Star by the Association for Psychological Science (APS) for significant early-career contributions to the field. His work focuses on developing new ways to acquire and synthesize psychological and neuropsychiatric data. His profile was featured in the May/June 2011 issue of the APS Observer.

Professor Alice Healy gave the Rosecrans Invited Address at the 57th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) in Jacksonville, Florida, in March 2011. The address, entitled “Principles of Training,” discussed experiments conducted in her lab aimed at providing guidelines for enhanced training effectiveness.
State-of-the-Art Brain Imaging Comes to CU-Boulder Campus

“The new Intermountain Neuroimaging Consortium, a joint venture between CU-Boulder and the Mind Research Network of Albuquerque, New Mexico, has as its centerpiece a new Siemens 3 Tesla Magnetic Resonance Imaging System. This state-of-the-art system will allow researchers to examine how brain structure and function are related to a variety of different mental and emotional functions while also providing insights into how such brain systems may be disrupted in individuals with a variety of psychological disorders.”

– Marie Banich, Executive Director

To see more photos and read an article about fMRI at CU, go to http://psych.colorado.edu/alumni/
Alumni Spotlight: Ann Rayner Wood, Class of 1940

Ann Rayner Wood (BA ’40) has had an enduring interest in psychology throughout the span of her ninety-three years. In fact, she recently watched Neurons for Everyday Life, a video program from The Great Courses film series. “Psychology has been the basis of a constant curiosity for me,” she says. “In reading the news or magazines, science and psychological items always get my attention first. With that kind of knowledge, you just keep building and building on it.”

Ms. Wood enrolled in the psychology department at CU in 1936 after being dissuaded from pursuing her original pre-med interests. “It was the biological sciences that interested me and so I signed up as a pre-med student and took a pre-med class and I just loved it, just soaked it up,” she remembers. Unfortunately, she says, those were “bad years for women” in pre-med. One of her professors took her aside and told her, “The fellows in the [CU Medical School] program don’t want a woman as a doctor and the faculty don’t want you, either. They will make it very hard for you.” He convinced her to switch majors, she says, but he chose psychology because of her curiosity about the field.

Although greatly interested in psychology and the workings of the mind, she found abnormal psychology disturbing. She recalls a senior class field trip to observe patients in a psychiatric hospital in Denver, which was quite upsetting for her. “[I] just couldn’t handle it,” she says. Based on her negative reaction and the sensitivity she felt during her field trip experience, Ms. Wood chose against a career in counseling. She wasn’t sure how to practically use her psychology degree otherwise, due to what she describes as the “vagueness of options for women in psychology” at the time. She decided to pursue library science, since she’d worked as a student librarian at Norlin Library. After completing a library science degree at DU, she got a job at a public library in Lake Forest, Illinois, where her parents lived. The town was located next to Great Lakes Naval Training Station, where she first met Ensign Charles Wood. She was quite taken with the young U.S. Naval Academy graduate, who was “tall and handsome and in a uniform.”

The couple went on to marry and raise four daughters. In time, they both became deeply involved in gay, lesbian, and transgender support and advocacy, a cause they’d be well aware of for most of their lives. Ms. Wood proudly notes that her husband, who later got a degree in theology and became an Episcopal priest, was the first person ever to testify to a congressional committee in 1992 on behalf of gays in the military. The couple was actively involved with PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and for many years Ms. Wood covered the GLBT support line for that agency. “Anything I learned in psychology was certainly useful there, and anything I didn’t know about gays and lesbians I learned on that line, day and night, during those awful AIDS years,” she says.

Ms. Wood traces part of her interest in supporting the gay community to her time at CU. “Of my close chums that I ended up with at CU, all the men were gay,” she explains. “But we never talked about it, which to me is very sad. We were so ignorant then. I like people to be honest and open and I hate secrets. Having to live a lie is poisonous.” On a more personal level, she feels she’s been particularly attuned to populations who were considered outsiders because she herself was an immigrant. Having been born in England and immigrating here from Canada when she was young, she notes that she always felt like an outsider herself. From that vantage point, she says she felt drawn throughout her life to be of help to those who are disfranchised or in need. “I’m conscious of people around me and always want to help them. It’s been so rewarding to know that I could help people who really needed it.”

Her feeling to help those in need is also evident when she talks about the focus on brain research in our department. “I respect scientific research in and of itself, but I’m always pleased when there’s also a purposefulness towards aiding mankind,” she says. “With psychological problems, as with any unusual condition, even describing the complaint and giving it a name helps those with the problem. If it’s a mystery, it’s much worse.”

When Ms. Wood reflects on her own life, she talks about her heritage of compassion. “I’ve had a great life. I’ve been blessed by wonderful family. My mother and father both taught me about accepting all people and races. And they both taught me very much about honesty and fairness. And that’s what I passed on to my own kids.” —Aliza Yagal

[Image: CU psychology professors and students on an outing circa 1940. Courtesy of alumna Ann Rayner Wood.]

Ann Rayner Wood (BA ’40), a ninety-three-year-old graduate, is spotlighted in this issue on page 6.

Phil Chase (PhD ’56), retired from consulting and teaching, lives on a lake in North Carolina (golfing country).

James R. Sherman, PhD (BA ’63 Psychology & Management) posted a career update and a resume (see wiki post).

Barbara (Glassman) Wilson (BA ’71) noted several careers and an interesting personal life, including marriage and raising two daughters.

Andrea G. Sondano, PhD (BA ’72) is faculty and an Executive-in-Residence in the Health Sector Management Program in the School of Management at Boston University.

Christopher (Kit) Tennis, PhD (BA ’75) has been a management professor and spent twenty-five years as an organizational development consultant.

Donald Novak, PhD (BA ’76) worked as a leadership consultant for twenty-five+ years for global Fortune 100 companies and built a firm, the Exertor Group.

(D. Jamie Loewy) Jamie Gordon (BA ’77) is a licensed esthetician, practicing from her studio in Lafayette, Colorado.

David L. Shern (PhD ’80), President and CEO of Mental Health America, was recently appointed to CU’s Graduate School Advisory Council.

Highlights from Alumni News on our Website

Alumni who sent us updates over the past year are listed below. You’ll find a full account of their news, as well as updates submitted by other alumni over the years, on our Alumni News website at: http://psych.colorado.edu/alumni.

Click on the “Alumni News” link. You may initially see a “Permission Denied” message. Click on the “Login” button. The username and password are “psychology” and “alumni”

Rhonda Zoker Beaufre, MA, LMFT (BA ’84) is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist currently practicing in Longmont, Colorado. She is married with two children.

Matthew J. Shapir (BA ’81, PhD ’86) is a professor of psychology in Fresno, California, and a research consultant for the Fresno Police. He is married and lives in the Sierra foothills.

Richard Curtis, PhD (BA ’87) teaches philosophy at various community colleges around Seattle. He married another psychology alum, Suzanne Roberts, MSW (BA ’88).

Patricia B. Sikora (PhD ’92) is in the Boulder area and is principal/owner of Sikora Associates, LLC, providing organizational and marketing research services.

Ashley Mayon (BA ’03) went on to experiment with non-scientific ways of dealing with people and works as a Soul Memory Discovery Facilitator.

Allison Mitchell (BA ’03) is in her fifth year in the clinical psychology PhD program at The New School for Social Research in New York City.

S. Joy Fox, PsyD (BA ’04) is working at the postdoctoral level with clients who have Alzheimer’s Dementia. She is about to launch her own neuropsychological assessment business in Denver.

Inbar Hanouna (BA ’08) was at Boston University when the update was submitted, finishing a master’s in psychology.

Erin Malangone (BA ’08) is a Coordinator for the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at Seattle Children’s Hospital and plans to go back to school for counseling psychology and deaf studies.

Megie Shean (BA ’08) works for Morrison Child and Family Services in Portland, Oregon, and is headed to Pacific University for her PsyD.

Ernest Kim (BA ’09) is in chiropractic school, working on completing his doctorate degree.

Heather Faust (BA ’10) works at Mooseheart Child City and School in Illinois and plans to pursue a PsyD in clinical psychology or graduate work in neuroscience in the next few years.
Visit our Alumni News website for updates from alumni who sent us news.
Address: http://psych.colorado.edu/alumni/
Click on the “Alumni News” link. You may initially see a “Permission Denied” message.
For login information, email psychology.news@colorado.edu.

What’s New With You?
Share news about yourself on our alumni website. Include your name, degree(s), and year that you graduated from
CU. Feel free to add other information about yourself, including activities of interest (current employment, professional activities, family news, etc.) and insights into how your CU degree has helped to shape your life and work.
Send your news to: psychology.news@colorado.edu

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