

# Psycho-Babble

*Macalester College/ January/February 2009*

## Important Dates

Friday, Feb. 6 - Last day to register/validate/drop and add

Tuesday, Feb. 17  
Study Abroad Lunch,  
Olri 352, 11:30-12:30

Friday, Feb. 20 Last day to designate a grading option

Friday Socials are every Friday during the semester at 3:20 by the awards wall. Check the white board for the "treat" of the week and the hosts for the social.

Saturday, February 14 - Valentines Day

Watch the whiteboard by the office for candidate talks and try to attend the talk if possible. Student feedback on the candidates is critical to any decision made by the department.

## Chair Talk from Kendrick

Welcome back to all of you! The start of a new semester is often a hectic, yet exciting time of the year. This semester will be no different.

Last week, we had our final Developmental Psychologist candidate visit campus. Our hope is to conclude the search very soon and welcome a new faculty member to our department.

In the first couple of weeks of

February, candidates for our Cognitive Neuroscientist position will also come to campus. Please be sure to attend the talks, and lunches if you are able, so you can give us your thoughts about each candidate.

Beyond the job candidate visits, there is quite a bit happening in the department. Keep an eye out for e-mails and flyers to stay on top of everything.

## Social/Cultural Issues Reading Group

Sun No is starting up a (sno@macalester.edu) if you are interested in joining.

students interested in social or cultural psychology topics. The group will meet weekly to discuss a journal article chosen by members of the group. As a member of the reading group you will develop journal article reading skills in a welcoming environment. Please send Sun No an email



Sun No

## Study Abroad Lunch - Tuesday, Feb 17

Each semester we welcome back our majors who studied abroad the previous semester at a lunch. This semester the lunch will be on Tuesday, February 17 in Olri 352, 11:30-12:30. Students who studied abroad fall semester are: **Kitty Elmer-Dewitt**, who studied in the Czech Republic, Prague, **Devin English** who studied at St. Andrews University in Scotland, **Jillian Laffrey**, who was at the University of Westminster, London, **Becky Nieber** who was in the Augsburg College study abroad program in Namibia and **Robert Schwed**, who studied at University of Westminster, London England, and **Huong Nguyen** who studied in East Anglia.



This is a great time to learn about the study abroad experience as well as to enjoy the pleasures of being an "armchair traveler". Lunch will be Jimmy John Subs, chips, fruit and cookies. Paul Nelson and Aditi Naik from the Study Abroad office will also be there to answer questions. We hope to see you there!

## Lottery Award Winners

At the poster presentations last December we drew for the lottery winners from the research participation slips. Here are the winners:

USB Case: **Jacob Weindling**, **Nkayo Drepaul**, **Joe Schubert**, **Claire Briguglio**, **Brian Stephenson**, **Celeste Prince**

USB Drives: **Rosemarie Sese**, **Ahmad Matyana**, **Alexa Rosenberg**, **Emma Sheppard**

\$50 Gift: **Elise Goldin**

We want to thank everyone who participated in the research studies and hope you will continue to participate this spring.



**Joelle Taknint '10**  
presenting her research  
last fall.

## Keon West '06 Returns to Mac



Keon West '06, a Rhodes Scholar and Doctor of Philosophy Candidate in Psychology at Oxford University, England presented his research to his former Macalester College professors and others on December 8, 2008. Keon anticipates finishing his Ph.D. in 2010. The title of his talk was: Imagined contact with schizophrenic persons: Testing imagined contact as a prejudice-reducing intervention."

**Keon with Kendrick Brown, Brooke Lea & Jack Rossmann**

## Congratulations Eric!



Eric Wiertelak demonstrating his dancing technique with Amanda Richardson.

Last December in Las Vegas at a national dance competition, Eric competed in 10 events (including 2 each of WALTZ, TANGO, VIENNESE WALTZ, FOXTROT and QUICKSTEP) and placed FIRST in ALL TEN. He and his partner then danced in 5 "Bronze" and championship and scholarship events, placing 2nd in ONE and 3rd in FOUR, making the semifinal rounds overall.

Ask Eric about his trophy!

## Psych Club plans to meet in February

The Psych Club leaders (Evan Welo, Meg Soli, Lisa Herndon & Becky Nieber) are planning an event for February. Plans are still pretty nebulous but we think it will be in the evening with treats and some of the topics they want to discuss are t-shirt designs for this year, programming ideas, volunteering, election of officers, and whatever else you would like to talk about.

Psych Club is open to anyone who has an interest in psychology. If you are interested in becoming involved, feel free to contact one of them.



Evan, Meg & Lisa (Becky not pictured)

## Important Dates for Spring Semester

**Wednesday, March 11, MPA Distinguished Scholar Lecture, 7:30. Weyerhaeuser Board Room**

**"A New Test for Brain Function Based on Magnetoencephalography (MEG)(DSL)"**

**Apostolos Georgopoulos, M.D., Ph.D., Regents Professor, McKnight Presidential Chair in Cognitive Neuroscience, and the American Legion Brain Sciences Chair at the University of Minnesota.**

The essence of brain function lies in the continuous interactions among massively interconnected neural elements. These interactions were assessed in high temporal resolution (every millisecond) using 248 MEG sensors which record every brain signal fast and undistorted. It was discovered that the pattern of synchronous neural interactions differed among healthy brains and those of patients with various diseases, multiple sclerosis, and others. Based on this information, a test was developed that is simple (just eye fixation), short (1 minute), noninvasive, and safe. The results obtained to present are very promising and may lead this test to become the first truly functional brain test.

**Wednesday, April 15, Johnson Memorial Lecture, 7:00 p.m.**

The Johnson Memorial Lecture is an annual lecture sponsored by psychology. This year our speaker is Walter Kintsch, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Colorado in Boulder. He retired from being director of the Institute of Cognitive Science in 2004. His research focus has been on the study of how people understand language, using both experimental methods and computational modeling techniques. In cooperation with the Dutch linguist Teun van Dijk, he formulated the first psychological process theory of discourse comprehension in 1978. In 1988, this work was reformulated as a constraint-satisfaction process. His 1998 book "Comprehension" summarizes the empirical and theoretical work from recent years. Kintsch received the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association in 1992. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Humboldt University in Berlin in 2001. He has been Chair of the Governing Boards of the Cognitive Science Society and the Psychonomic Society, and President of Division 3 of the American Psychological Association.

## MUPC is Saturday, April 18

The 44<sup>th</sup> annual Minnesota Undergraduate Psychology Conference (MUPC) is Saturday, April 18 at the College of Saint Benedict & Saint John's University in Collegeville Minnesota. This one day annual conference promotes undergraduate research in the field of psychology and will feature oral and poster presentations of student research. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Laura A. King, Professor of Psychology at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Dr. King's research interests include emotion, health, motivation, goal setting, personality, and the self/identity. Registration is free and open to the psychology community. A call for proposals will be forthcoming.

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*Presenting at MUPC is a requirement of the psychology major at Macalester.*

## Mid-Brains Conference is May 2

Macalester College will host the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Mid Brains conference for neuroscience majors on Saturday May 2<sup>nd</sup> here at Macalester. The conference will feature a keynote speech, presentations from faculty in the different graduate neuroscience programs in the region and student presentations. The day concludes with a BBQ for all.

## And more babble . . .

**Alexis Goffe '07** is starting the University of St. Thomas masters in counseling program. Congratulations Alexis!

**Sarah Gold '07** reports that she is enjoying her job as Case Manager for a non-profit called Safe Horizon which is within a larger program called the Brooklyn Family Justice Center, which is located in the Domestic Violence Unit of the Brooklyn DA's office.

**Danai Gurira '01's** play *Eclipsed* will have its premiere at the McCarter Theatre Center in New Jersey on Jan 29, 2008.

Mary Claire and her husband, Eric, on a visit to the Getty Art Center in Los Angeles, ran into alum Sheridan Enomoto '01. Sheridan works with school groups at the Getty.



**Eric & Mary Claire with Sheridan Enomoto '01**

## Psych in the News

### **Thinking Like a President : How Power Affects Complex Decision Making**

Presidential scholars have written volumes trying to understand the presidential mind. How can anyone juggle so many complicated decisions? Do those seeking office have a unique approach to decision making? Studies have suggested that power changes not only a person's responsibilities, but also the way they think. Now, a new study in the December issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, indicates that having power may lead people to automatically think in a way that makes complex decision-making easier.

### **Caffeine No Substitute for a Nap to Enhance Memory**

#### **Equivalent of 2-3 Cups of Coffee Worsens Motor Learning and Word Recall**

Hoping to improve your tennis serve? It's probably better to catch a few winks than load up on java after a lesson, results of a NIMH-supported study suggest. Caffeine impaired such motor learning and verbal memory, while an afternoon nap benefited all three types of learning tested by Sara Mednick, Ph.D., and colleagues at the University of California, San Diego. The researchers report on their findings in the November issue of *Behavioural Brain Research*

### **SIBLINGS OF MENTALLY DISABLED FACE OWN LIFELONG CHALLENGES, ACCORDING TO RESEARCHERS**

People who have a sibling with mental illness are more likely to be depressed during their lifetimes. People who have a sibling with a mental illness are more likely to suffer episodes of depression at some point in their lives, say researchers who analyzed four decades of data. Additionally, they found people with a sibling with low IQ are more likely to live near that brother or sister but be somewhat emotionally detached from that sibling. The findings were reported in the December issue of the *Journal of Family Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association.

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*“People who have a sibling with a mental illness are more likely to suffer episodes of depression at some point in their lives.”*

### **Strategic video game improves critical cognitive skills in older adults**

Illinois researchers found that several important cognitive skills improved in older adults who were trained in a strategic video game. A desire to rule the world may be a good thing if you're over 60 and worried about losing your mental faculties. A new study found that adults in their 60s and 70s can improve a number of cognitive functions by playing a strategic video game that rewards nation-building and territorial expansion. This is the first such study of older adults, and it is the first to find such pronounced effects on cognitive skills not directly related to the skills learned in the video game. The research appears in the journal **Psychology & Aging**

## Psych in the News (cont'd)

### Not All Antipsychotics Created Equal: Analysis Reveals Important Differences

An analysis of studies on antipsychotics reveals multiple differences among the newer, second-generation antipsychotics as well as the older medications, and suggests the current classification system blurs important differences, rendering it unhelpful. The analysis, partially funded by NIMH, was published online December 5, 2008, in *The Lancet*.

### Standing in Someone Else's Shoes, Almost for Real

From the outside, psychotherapy can look like an exercise in self-absorption. In fact, though, therapists often work to pull people out of themselves: to see their behavior from the perspective of a loved one, for example, or to observe their own thinking habits from a neutral distance. Marriage counselors have couples role-play, each one taking the other spouse's part. Psychologists have rapists and other criminals describe their crime from the point of view of the victim. Like novelists or moviemakers, their purpose is to transport people, mentally, into the mind of another. Now, neuroscientists have shown that they can make this experience physical, creating a "body swapping" illusion that could have a profound effect on a range of therapeutic techniques. At the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience last month, Swedish researchers presented evidence that the brain, when tricked by optical and sensory illusions, can quickly adopt any other human form, no matter how different, as its own. "You can see the possibilities, putting a male in a female body, young in old, white in black and vice versa," said Dr. Henrik Ehrsson of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, who with his colleague Valeria Petkova described the work to other scientists at the meeting. Their full study is to appear online in the journal *PLoS One*.

### Conscious vs. Unconscious Thought in Making Complicated Decisions

When faced with a difficult decision, we try to come up with the best choice by carefully considering all of the options, maybe even resorting to lists and lots of sleepless nights. So it may be surprising that recent studies have suggested that the best way to deal with complex decisions is to not think about them at all—that unconscious thought will help us make the best choices. Although this may seem like an appealing strategy, new research in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, cautions that there are limitations in the efficacy of unconscious thought making the best decisions.

Researchers found that there are situations where unconscious thought will not result in the best choice being selected. The findings showed that in some instances (when the payoffs were similar), thinking about the task for as long as it takes to make a decision was as effective as unconscious thought, resulting in the most profitable options being chosen. However, when there were large differences in the amount of money to be won, mulling over the decision at their own pace led the volunteers to larger payoffs than unconscious thought. The volunteers who were told to consciously think about the decision for a specific amount of time performed poorly in both experiments. The authors explain that those volunteers had "too much time to think" about the task and suggest that their attention shifted "to information of lesser relevance," resulting in less profitable decisions.

These results suggest that although unconscious thought may help us make the right decision in some instances, it is often better to rely on self-paced conscious thought and really focus on the problem at hand.

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our website.*

### Psych in the News (cont'd)

#### When $2 + 2 =$ Major Anxiety: Math Performance in Stressful Situations

Imagine you are sitting in the back of a classroom, daydreaming about the weekend. Then, out of nowhere, the teacher calls upon you to come to the front the room and solve a math problem. In front of everyone. If just reading this scenario has given you sweaty palms and an increased heart rate, you are not alone. Many of us have experienced math anxiety and in a new report in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, University of Chicago psychologist Sian L. Beilock examines some recent research looking at why being stressed about math can result in poor performance in solving problems.

Much of Beilock's work suggests that working memory is a key component of math anxiety. Working memory (also known as short term memory), helps us to maintain a limited amount of information at one time, just what is necessary to solve the problem at hand. Beilock's findings suggest that worrying about a situation (such as solving an arithmetic problem in front of a group of people) takes up the working memory that is available for figuring out the math problem.

#### *About Psycho-Babble...*

Psycho-Babble is a monthly newsletter for Psychology and Cognitive and Neuroscience majors and other interested students. We welcome contributions from students and faculty. The goal of the newsletter is to inform the community of events, people and issues at Macalester and beyond.



Brain, Mind & Behavior Class in their Kids Judge! t-shirts, December 2008