The State of the Department

Rebecca Anne Boylan Professor in Education and Society and Psychology Department Chair Susan C. Levine highlights some of the department’s most important news- from faculty honors to student achievements. Full Story

Psychology Department Faculty Receive High Honors

This past year, Psychology Department faculty were honored with a number of distinguished awards and honors. John Cacioppo, Susan Goldin-Meadow, Steven Shevell, Greg Norman, and Alex Shaw are among those recognized this year. Full Story

A Collaboration to Examine Brain Networks Related to Learning

Professors Sarah London and Marc Berman have joined forces to tackle questions about the relationship between development, experience, and neural networks in the context of learning. Full Story

Life After Chicago: Career Paths for Recent PhD Graduates

Over the last two years, eighteen students received their PhD's from the Department and are finding exciting career opportunities. Full Story

Friends and Alumni Support the Department

Several gifts to the Psychology Department have allowed us to continue to offer an alumni lecture series, support graduate student research and conference travel, and support undergraduate research during the summer quarter. Full Story

Support the Department

Gifts from alumni and friends enrich the intellectual life of the Department and provide critical opportunities for our students. We are grateful for your support.
The State of the Department

With the end of fall quarter and the holidays approaching, it is a great time to reconnect with our alumni and friends. This year, we welcomed thirteen new graduate students in our Department. These students hail from as close by as the University itself to as far away as India. Our new students arrived with many ideas for research and are busy completing fall courses, including our Proseminar. In the Proseminar, students not only become acquainted with the research programs of our faculty, they also prepare NSF applications. Last year we had three students win highly competitive NSF Graduate Research Fellowships, and one receive an honorable mention. That is a terrific result, and we eagerly await the results for the students who have applied this year.

This fall, our faculty welcomed a new lecturer to the Department – Katherine Krpan. Her expertise in clinical neuroscience will broaden the offerings in the Department and will address an area that is of high interest to our undergraduates. This first year, Katie will be applying her teaching talents in two sections of the MIND course, which continues to grow in popularity. We are very pleased that Katie has joined us.

This has been a very busy fall for the faculty. We have embarked on a search in the cognitive area and were very pleased to have received more than 250 applications for this position. We now are carefully reading the applications with the goal of selecting a few for campus visits early in the winter quarter. We hope that we will be welcoming a new faculty member to the Department as a result of this search.

Thanks to the work of our colloquium committee (Boaz Keysar, chair; Ed Awh, Susan Goldin-Meadow, and Jeni Kubota) we had two outstanding colloquia this fall, which added to the intellectual life of our Department. Our speakers included Michael Norton (Harvard University) and Stephen Mitroff (George Washington University). In addition, program area brownbag and colloquia sponsored by other units, including the Grossman Institute and the Committee on Education, continue to provide a rich set of learning opportunities for students and faculty in Psychology.

As you will read in the newsletter, two faculty members in our Department were recently recognized by very special honors. In April 2017, Susan Goldin-Meadow delivered the Nora and Edward Ryerson Lecture, discussing her seminal work on language and gesture. Her spectacular lecture was followed by a celebratory dinner, which was very well attended by students, faculty, and community members. The Ryerson Lecturer is selected by a faculty committee to be awarded to a faculty member based on research findings of lasting significance. They indeed made a fabulous choice in selecting Susan Goldin-Meadow to receive this honor. More recently, John Cacioppo was awarded the Tiffany and Margaret Blake Phoenix Prize, a prize that has only been awarded to four other faculty members in the Social Sciences in 23 years since its inception – James Coleman, Marshall Sahlins, Gary Becker, and Robert Lucas. This Phoenix Prize is awarded to a faculty member whose research has truly shaped the field and fittingly honors John Cacioppo’s groundbreaking research and influence on the fields of psychology and neuroscience and his founding of the field of social neuroscience. The faculty in the Department enjoyed toasting John at a celebratory dinner along with other invited guests from across the University and throughout the country.

In closing, I wish you all joyous holidays and a happy, healthy, productive and fulfilling 2018. I encourage you to keep in touch, to share news with us, and to stop by the Department for a visit or to attend a talk. The door is always open, and we are happy to hear from our departmental alumni and friends.

Susan C. Levine
Rebecca Anne Boylan Professor and Chair
Psychology Department Faculty Receive High Honors

John T. Cacioppo, the Tiffany and Margaret Atwood Distinguished Service Professor, was recently awarded the Phoenix Prize, the Division of the Social Sciences' highest honor. Professor Cacioppo was selected to receive this award because his career-long contributions to the fields of psychology and neuroscience have had a global influence on the direction of research and inquiry and have led to a greater understanding of the neural mechanisms underlying social processes and the effects of social factors on biological processes. Since the founding of the field of social neuroscience by Cacioppo and colleague Gary Berns in the 1990s, the field has become a dynamic area of inquiry within psychology and the neurosciences.

"Put simply, John is one of those once-in-a-generation psychologists whose impact is felt broadly and deeply within the field. He is a creative genius whose cumulative accomplishments (represented in over 700 research papers and 20 authored or edited books) are so inseparable from the field that it is hard to imagine contemporary psychology without him," wrote longtime collaborator Richard E. Petty, Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Psychology at The Ohio State University.

The Phoenix Prize was established in 1994 by former Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences Collin Lucas to constitute the highest faculty recognition the Division could bestow. It is to be awarded only periodically to those who, through the course of their careers, have charted the trajectory of research in the social sciences and have thus contributed to the cycle of intellectual renewal across the disciplines. It is this sense of renewal that is enshrined in the prize's name, drawn from the symbol of our University.

The Phoenix Prize was bestowed at a dinner held on October 30th. An academic conference in Cacioppo’s honor, is being planned for Spring 2018.

This past Spring, Susan Goldin-Meadow, the MacArthur Distinguished Service Professor, was invited to deliver the University of Chicago's prestigious Nora and Edward Ryerson Lecture, an honor given to faculty who have made research contributions of lasting significance.

Professor Goldin-Meadow’s lecture explored the resilience of language and gesture in the way people communicate, drawing on her current research on the gestural languages that deaf children in the United States and in Nicaragua use without benefit of linguistic input. She described how children who are congenitally deaf and unable to learn the spoken language around them, without any exposure to sign language, nevertheless use their hands to communicate in a way that takes on many of the forms and functions of language. In addition, Professor Goldin-Meadow discussed the gestures that hearing people use when talking, the resilience of those gestures within the speech system, and the role that the gestures play in how we learn."Gesture is versatile in form and function. Under certain circumstances, gesture can substitute for speech, and when it does, it embodies the resilient properties of language. Under other circumstances, gesture can form a fully integrated system with speech. When it does, it both predicts and promotes learning," Goldin-Meadow said.

Steven Sheweill, the Elslam Hastings Moore Distinguished Service Professor of Psychology and Ophthalmology & Visual Science, and faculty member in the graduate program in Computational Neuroscience, was elected an Honorary Member of the International Colour Vision Society at its meeting in Erlangen, Germany this summer. The distinction is awarded occasionally by a vote of the Society’s membership and recognizes outstanding contributions to color science. Sheweill’s research interests include human vision (especially color) and mathematical psychology.
This past Spring, two department faculty, Greg Norman and Alex Show, received the Rising Star Award from the Association for Psychological Science in recognition for their early career contributions to the field of psychology. The APS Rising Star designation is presented to outstanding psychological scientists in the earliest stages of their research careers post-PhD whose innovative work has already advanced the field and signals great potential for their continued contributions.

Norman’s research explores social contributions to stress reactivity, emotion, and health through studies ranging from molecular neurobiology to social neuroscience. Norman takes a multilevel approach to the study of the mind, brain and social behavior and incorporates a wide range of methodological and theoretical perspectives that range from molecular and systems biology to cognitive and social psychology.

Show’s research focuses on how human beings navigate the complex social world by tracking reputations and signaling to each other. He studies fairness, intellectual property and reputation and how these things develop throughout childhood. Show’s investigations draw on theories from philosophy and behavioral economics as well as developmental, social, and evolutionary psychology to investigate the ways in which people modify their behavior to change how others see them. Show also has research on children’s developing notions about intellectual property, morality, resource conflict, gossip, and alliances (friendships).
A Collaboration to Examine Brain Networks Related to Learning

The study of learning has engaged scientists, educators, and philosophers for centuries, underscoring that multiple approaches and levels of analysis provide important, convergent insight into its mechanisms. Two Psychology Professors, Sarah London and Marc Berman, have joined their complementary expertise to tackle novel questions about the relationship between development, experience, and neural networks in the context of learning.

The London lab employs a combination of molecular, genomic, and behavioral strategies to identify neural properties that promote and limit the ability to learn in a non-human animal, the zebra finch songbird. The Berman lab combines non-invasive functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and network-level computational tools to determine the effects of the physical environment on properties of neural networks and cognitive outcomes in humans. Over the course of months, London and Berman had several casual conversations about how interesting it would be to fuse the advantages of their expertise. Notably, individual zebra finch songbirds can be raised in controlled environments that manipulate brain functioning. With fMRI, one can quantify whole brain network properties from multiple timepoints within the same individual to assess how environmental manipulations over time affect brain functioning. From these conversations, they began a collaboration focused on a novel question: Can the ability to learn be predicted by features of a brain network?

Together, the labs devised methods to acquire anatomical and functional scans from zebra finches across development, and to compare neural networks from birds who had been reared in environments known to differentially affect the ability to learn. Analysis of the datasets are ongoing, but with extensive work from their PhD student, Elliot Layden, several intriguing results are emerging about how brains work. First, the mammalian brain has tremendous functional symmetry as measured by the correlation between brain activity of homologous pairs of brain regions (e.g., the left superior parietal lobule and the right superior parietal lobule). Much of this symmetry has been attributed to the Corpus Collosum (CC), a dense bundle of axonal fibers that connect the two hemispheres. Interestingly, zebra finches also exhibit a high degree of functional symmetry that matches that of mammals, but, importantly, zebra finches do not have a CC. This research demonstrates that functional symmetry may have evolved much earlier than when the CC developed suggesting that the CC may accentuate functional symmetry, but is not the cause of it. Second, intriguing differences in functional symmetry occur when zebra finch begin to learn to sing compared to when they are kept from hearing bird song. In addition, it appears that increased symmetry is related to the potential to learn and decreases as learning progresses.

These projects have revealed how brains with different structures “solve” the same cognitive problems to support learning of complex and meaningful behaviors. From them emerge new insight into neural networks for learning, which opens new avenues for future inquiry. London and Berman appreciate that these successes could only have resulted from collaborative efforts across psychological disciplines, and are looking forward to continuing to work together.
Life After Chicago: Career Paths for Recent PhD Graduates

Over the last two years, eighteen graduate students received their PhDs from the Department. Our graduates are finding fulfilling employment opportunities both in and outside of academia.

A number of our recent graduates have accepted faculty positions. Last summer, Zoe Liberman became an assistant professor at the University of California (Santa Barbara). Hiroki Kotabe is now an assistant professor at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, Korea following a postdoctoral position at the University of Chicago with Dr. Marc Berman. Another graduate last summer, Eliza Congdon, spent last year as a visiting assistant professor at Williams College. This fall, she started an assistant professorship at Bucknell University.

Several summer 2017 graduates are also pursuing positions in academia this year. Ivo Gyurovski is a visiting assistant professor of psychology at Hampden-Sydney College teaching introductory and social psychology courses and advising students on their theses. Dominic Gibson is a Teaching Fellow in the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago, where he is teaching psychology and social sciences core courses.

Postdoctoral positions continue to be a popular next step for our graduates. Last year, Courtney Filippi began a postdoctoral position with Dr. Danny Pine at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Elizabeth Necka began a postdoctoral fellowship with Dr. Lauren Atlas at National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at NIH, and Miriam Novack stated a postdoctoral fellowship working with Dr. Steven Franzeneri at Northwestern University. Several of this year’s graduates also chose to pursue postdoctoral positions: Hyesang Chang started a postdoctoral fellowship in the Cognitive and Systems Neuroscience Lab at Stanford University with Dr. Vinod Menon. Sayuri Hayakawa began a postdoctoral position working with Dr. Viorica Marian in the Bilingualism and Psycholinguistics Research Group at Northwestern University where she will both extend her graduate work on foreign languages and decision making, as well as to begin new lines of research investigating the effects of bilingualism on cognition and behavior. Keith Yoder is continuing his research as a postdoctoral fellow with Dr. Jean Decety at the University of Chicago, working on a project in collaboration with Dr. Kent Kiehl at the University of New Mexico that uses structural and functional magnetic resonance imaging to investigate socioemotional processing in incarcerated females.

Our graduates are also finding employment in other exciting areas. Last year, Stephen Gray parlayed his research on memory into a position as a consumer insight analyst at Facebook. Wei Wang is applying his doctoral research on color vision in his position as Senior Color and Image Quality Scientist at OmniVision Technologies. Erin Cable, who devoted a great deal of time to mentoring college students, is now advising students at Northwestern University who are interested in biology, psychology, mathematics, and health professions. Serena Klos is applying her research expertise as a data scientist at Mattersight, a SaaS (Software as Service) company that analyzes and predict customer behavior based on the language exchanged during service and sales interactions. Another recent graduate, Jason Sattizahn, has a research and development position at Sony PlayStation, where he has been able to apply his research and experience on performance anxiety into his work on user experience while playing video games.
Friends and Alumni Support the Department

Norman H. Anderson Awards

For the seventh year, the Department of Psychology awarded Norman H. Anderson funds for domestic conference travel and research-related expenses. This past year, thirty-two awards were made to students in psychology. Students presented their research at ten different conferences across the country including meetings for the Society for Research in Child Development, the Cognitive Neuroscience Society, and the Vision Sciences Society. In addition, six graduate students had the opportunity to pursue original lines of research in their labs. The projects this past year included a study on space-time associations and space-number associations, research on alternate uses of forgiveness, a study on the relationship between social excuses and sensitivity to disease avoidance cues, and research on insight learning. We are excited to see the many publications and conference presentations that have resulted from this opportunity for graduate students to explore independent research programs.

Earl R. Franklin Fellows

Earl R. Franklin, an alumnus of the College, established a fellowship in 2006 that awards students in the Departments of Psychology and Comparative Human Development merit based funding to conduct summer research. The Psychology Department selected four Franklin Fellows for 2017. This summer Sophie Arnold worked with Dr. Alex Shaw on a project examining which factors affect how children make decisions and how gender affects how children negotiate. Uriel Heller’s project with Dr. Boaz Keysar and Dr. Miwa Yasui explored the relationship between multilingualism and attitudes towards mental health as mediated by socio-normative and emotive pathways. In particular, Uriel was motivated by the potential applicability of this research to Asian-American immigrants, a population in which mental health services are highly stigmatized. Tyler Warner’s research with Dr. Lindsey Richland focused on how comparative spatial layouts and gesturing interact with the cognitive demands of learning mathematics in the classroom. Finally, Marianna Zhang’s project with Dr. Daniel Casasanto involved an fMRI study investigating the role of bodily experience in how we understand language about the actions of ourselves and others.

Montgomery Summer Fellowship

In 2011, Lisa Montgomery made a generous gift to the Infant Learning and Development Lab to support summer research projects related to child development. The Montgomery Summer Fellowship awards a summer research stipend to one undergraduate each year to support a student’s research in an area of interest without having the burden of needing to find additional summer employment. This year, the Montgomery Summer Fellowship supported Elizabeth Joyce’s research which looks at twelve 18-month-old infants from the United States and the Yucatec Mayan peninsula in their natural environment. Using hour-long videos recorded in infants’ homes, Elizabeth marked all times people performed culturally relevant actions on objects around the infant. This project aims to explore action learning opportunities cross-culturally and contribute to the literature on early cultural transmission.