

We've Got Issues

Willamette University Psychology Department Quarterly Newsletter

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From the Chair

Spring break is not so far away now, with the end of another school year not so far beyond that. Although we hope you're getting the most out of this spring term, the department would like to also alert you to developments for next academic year.

The Department of Psychology will be welcoming a new member, Jeremy Miller, this coming September. Jeremy is currently finishing his dissertation for his Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Dr. Miller will be teaching a range of courses, including Psych 210, Psych 252 and 253, and both 300 and 400 level courses related to experimental/cognitive psychology (his specific area of research focus is in the study of memory). In other news, Professor Meredy Goldberg Edelson received this year's Jerry Hudson Award from the university for outstanding teaching, and Professor Sue Koger, newly promoted to the rank of Full Professor, will start her 3-year tour of duty as department chair beginning June 1.

Professor Tony Hermann will be on a sabbatical in Fall '05, and Professor Mark Stewart will be leading the Willamette group in Australia in Spring '06. Although their expertise is of course irreplaceable, we're delighted that Dr. Stacie Simmelink-Johnson has agreed to extend her position here for another year to teach additional courses for the department, mainly in the areas of introductory psychology, personality, and abnormal

psychology. Although course offerings for Fall '05 have yet to be finalized, we wanted to reassure people that we will be offering courses in all categories of the major in both the fall and spring semesters.

Another important change for next year involves our requirements for the Senior Experience. Although those of you currently enrolled in Psych 300 will already have heard, we want to be sure that everyone is aware of the new configuration for our senior experience internship program. First, all majors will enroll in the internship program; this includes both students doing traditional thesis work (now to be labeled a "research internship") as well as those working with more traditional agency placements ("field internships"). Students will complete their internship placement hours (~168 hours) either during the summer or the fall and will register for .5 credits in Psych 394 for the fall term of the senior year. The focus of 394 class meetings will be on sharing and processing the internship experience as well as on completing a "descriptive paper" reflecting on the internship experience. All seniors will then enroll for another .5 credit for Psych 395 in the spring semester, where the focus of the class meetings and assignments will be on drafting, revising, and completing the scholarly thesis paper required of all senior interns (or the research write-up, in the case of research interns).

In terms of long range planning, these changes make it increasingly

important for students to chat with their advisors as they contemplate study abroad plans and other activities that might impact the senior year. For example, Psych 253 must be successfully completed before students can begin Psych 395 (the main writing portion of the senior experience), and we will not normally be accepting applications for any research thesis or field placements in the spring. Students wishing to continue fall internships into the spring, however, can consult with faculty about doing so under the separate heading of "Independent Study." The bottom line to all this is that students expecting to complete their senior experience hours and go through the traditional May graduation need to plan ahead so that those hours take place either in the summer or fall of the senior year. Students hoping to have a December graduation need to plan with an advisor in advance in order to work out an alternative to Psych 395. Looking ahead is especially important for students planning study abroad activities in the spring of their junior year, so don't hesitate to talk with your advisor-- we're here to help!

Planning is obviously important, yet so is enjoying the here-and-now. So here's hoping all of you are having a great spring term. We've set a February record for rainless days, and I hope you've been savoring them!

James Friedrich
Chair, Dept. of Psychology

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Happy
St. Patrick's
Day!

Mark Your Calendar...

March 17th
St. Patrick's Day

March 21st—25th
Spring Vacation

April 20th—No classes
Student Scholarship

Professor Meredy Goldberg Edelson has conducted research related to the intelligence of individuals with autism. Below is an excerpt from an article reporting the results of a recent study. It was hypothesized that individuals with autism may not score as well on measures of intelligence if the measures include real-world knowledge items compared to more abstract measures of intelligence because individuals with autism often have social deficits that would prevent them from obtaining real-world information.”

[from Edelson, M.G. (in press). A car goes in the garage like a can of peas goes in the refrigerator: Do deficits in real-world knowledge affect the assessment of intelligence in individuals with autism? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disorders*, 20].

The practice of measuring intelligence in individuals with autism is commonplace. However, there is evidence to suggest that the level of intelligence in individuals with autism reported in the literature may depend on the nature of the test utilized to measure intelligence (Edelson, 2004). Most researchers agree that it is often difficult to determine the true level of intelligence in individuals with autism unless the possible interference of the symptoms of autism are recognized and controlled for in the assessment process (see Koegel, Koegel, & Smith, 1997).

It has been shown that children with autism can perform well on behaviors in which social interaction is not a vital component (Wetherby et al., 2000), and it has been suggested that one reason individuals with autism may have deficits in social or real-world knowledge may be due to incomplete or less sophisticated cognitive scripts for social situations (Volden & Johnston, 1999). The failure to have developed cognitive scripts for the social world may mean that, when faced with questions on tests requiring knowledge of how one acts or relationships in the real world, individuals with autism do not have a database to access for this information.

A study was conducted to attempt to determine whether real-world knowledge deficits might affect the intelligence test scores of individuals with autism. Two measures of cognitive ability were selected for use because of their similarity in format. The Test of Nonverbal Intelligence, 3rd edition (TONI-3) is a measure of abstract reasoning that does not tap specific areas of real-world knowledge to which individuals with autism may or may not have been exposed (Brown, Sherbenou, & Johnsen, 1997). The person is shown a stimulus pattern with abstract geometric shapes and is asked to select from between 4-6 options, which stimulus is missing in the pattern. The test is not timed, presents the stimuli visually, and does not require the individual to respond verbally.

The Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT) has a subscale entitled Analogic Reasoning (AR; Bracken & McCallum, 1998). This subscale is similar to the TONI-3 in that it presents the person with a stimulus pattern in which a portion of the pattern is missing. The person is required to select the correct response from 4 alternatives. Like the TONI-3, it is also a nonverbal, visually-presented test and is not timed. However, whereas all of the TONI-3 items test abstract reasoning, many of the items on the AR subscale tap real-world knowledge as well. That is, on the real-world knowledge items, the person must first identify the relationship between the two items depicted in the stimulus pattern that would be found in a real-world environment and then use reasoning to determine the correct response. For example, one item presented an analogy involving a car and a garage. Next to this analogy was a refrigerator and a blank. The person being assessed first needed to know that a car goes in a garage (requiring real-world knowledge) and also needed to know, from a series of alternative choices, what item goes in a refrigerator (requiring a different piece of real-world knowledge). Possible responses included a box of cereal, a sugar bowl, a can of peas, and a carton of milk (the correct response). This item, and others like it, were labeled as real-world knowledge items because they required knowledge of the world in addition to logic to be answered correctly.

There were significant differences between the two tests when taking into account the number of real-world knowledge items completed. There was a marginally significant trend for individuals competing more real-world knowledge items to score relatively worse on the AR subscale compared to the TONI-3, and, when age was controlled for to account for the greater number of real-world knowledge items earlier on the AR subscale, there was a significant interaction between percentage of real-world knowledge items completed and scores on the two tests. Participants scored better on the TONI-3, an abstract measure of intelligence, if they needed to complete a relatively higher percentage of real-world knowledge items on the AR subscale of the UNIT but scored slightly better on the AR subscale if they had to complete fewer real-world knowledge items on that measure.

Clearly, the purpose of an intellectual assessment is to obtain a valid estimate of an individual's cognitive abilities (Bracken & McCallum, 1998). However, if those who assess the intelligence of individuals with autism are not careful to recognize and reduce the interference of autistic symptoms on the testing process, then a valid estimate of intelligence is not likely. A response error made by an individual with autism on a measure of intelligence which involves a social judgment may reflect a social deficit alone and may not necessarily indicate a cognitive impairment (Lord & Paul, 1997). Similarly, individuals with autism who do not have adequate knowledge of the world gained through social interaction with the world may make errors on some measures of intelligence due to real-world knowledge deficits rather than true cognitive deficits. The fact that an individual with autism might respond that a can of peas goes in the refrigerator like a car goes in the garage on a test such as the UNIT may reflect nothing more than the individual's lack of knowledge of real-world information; it may not speak to his/her ability to think logically, a more valid indicator of intelligence.**

**For those interested in the references cited in this article, please see Professor Edelson.

If you think you're stressed due to the pressures of college, here are innovative ways you can increase your stress...

Psi Chi Membership Requirements:

1. Completion of at least 3 semesters or 5 quarters of the college course.
2. Completion of 9 semester hours or 14 quarter hours of psychology.
3. Registration for major or minor standing in psychology or for a program psychological in nature which is equivalent to such standings.
4. Undergraduates who are elected to Psi Chi must rank in the upper 35% of their class in general scholarship. In addition, they must also demonstrate superior scholarship in psychology, earning a minimum GPA in psychology courses of at least 3.0, and a minimum overall GPA of 3.00 in those few instances when the upper 35% falls below a 3.00 GPA. Psi Chi accepts the policy of the institution regarding grades.
5. For graduate students, an average grade of "B" or better in all graduate courses, including psychology.
6. High standards of personal behavior.
7. Two-thirds affirmative vote of those present at a regular meeting of the chapter.

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Introduction to Psychology, Memory: Theory & Applications