

# We've Got Issues

## Willamette University Psychology Department Quarterly Newsletter

### From the Editor

Even though we're already well into the second month of classes, we want to welcome everyone back to another academic year here in the Psychology Department. We especially want to welcome back those students who were abroad last semester and our newly declared majors and minors. The psychology department has some new faces that you may not recognize if you have frequented 2nd floor Smullin of late. In this issue of the newsletter, you will be introduced to our new Administrative Assistant, Elizabeth Martineau. The Psychology Department office has changed as well. It is now located in Smullin 220. Please stop by and say hi to Elizabeth when you're in the neighborhood.

We also have two new full-time visiting instructors this year as well. Staci Simmelink-Johnson is teaching Introductory Psychology and Abnormal Psychology: Adult (formerly Clinical/Abnormal Psychology), and Jill Yamashita is teaching

Introductory Psychology and Cognitive Processes. They share an office in 260 Smullin; Staci teaches on a Tuesday-Thursday schedule, and Jill teaches on a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule. You will learn more about each of them in upcoming issues of the newsletter.

In addition to the new faces in the department this year, there are some new events as well. The first of these is an upcoming advising session/social gathering for juniors in psychology. This event will take place at 6pm in Smullin 222 on Tuesday October 19th and should hopefully provide our juniors with needed information both about the psychology program and planning for the senior experience in psychology as well as provide assistance in planning for "life after Willamette." It is also a great opportunity to socialize with your fellow classmates. As last year, the Psychology Department is again conducting a search this term for a full-time tenure-tracked Cognitive Psy-

chologist. Therefore, you will be hearing about upcoming job talks/presentations given by our finalists for this position. We encourage psychology students to attend these presentations and to provide input on the candidates you'd like to see join the department.

As always, feel free to stop by and talk with any members of the Psychology Department if you have questions or if you just want to chat. There is a listing of who we are, what we're teaching this term, and where you can find us on the back page of the newsletter. Jim Friedrich remains chair of the department, so please consult him if there are any departmental issues or concerns you wish to discuss. Again, welcome back, and happy fall semester!

Meredy Goldberg Edelson  
Editor

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WELCOME  
BACK!!

### Mark Your Calendar

Mark your calendars for these upcoming events...

#### Tuesday, October 19th

Jr. Advising/Social Gathering  
6pm - 222 Smullin

#### Friday, October 22nd

Mid-Semester Day  
NO CLASSES

#### Sunday, October 31st

Happy Halloween!

#### Tuesday, November 2nd

Election Day - Go Vote!

#### Thursday, November 25th

Happy Thanksgiving!

## Why psychologists should care about chemicals, by Prof. Sue Koger

Greetings! As many of you know, I'm the department's physiological psychologist and am interested in the intersections of psychology and environmental science. Recently, I've been working on a comprehensive review of the evidence concerning a relationship between developmental disabilities like autism, AD/HD, and disorders of academic skills (e.g., reading and writing) and exposure to chemicals in the environment.

As students of psychology, you have probably heard that such disabilities are on the rise; in fact, you may have first hand experience with their effects. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004), approximately 17% of U.S. children (i.e., 12 million individuals) under the age of 18 are affected by one or more developmental disabilities impacting cognitive function, language or learning ability, emotional state, sensory and motor function, a variety of behaviors, or physical growth.

Coincidentally, human exposure to toxic chemicals is also increasing dramatically. For example, pesticides are toxic by design, and are produced and released intentionally into the environment. Whether they are meant to kill weeds (herbicides), insects (insecticides), rodents (rodenticides) or any other organism, humans are not impervious to the properties that render them toxic. In fact, many insecticides act as direct neurotoxicants; in other words, they are designed to disable the nervous systems of insects, and their mechanisms are directly relevant to human physiology.

While it is clear that developmental disabilities result from complex interactions among a variety of factors including genetics, nutrition, and social influences, the case is building for a significant role of environmental toxicants. It is estimated that anywhere between 3% and 25% of developmental defects result from exposure to toxic chemicals, either singly or in combination with other environmental factors such as maternal lifestyle choices (diet, tobacco, alcohol), and economic circumstances (Landrigan, Kimmel, Correa, & Eskenazi, 2004).

Unfortunately, regulatory efforts to reduce

exposure to toxicants are often reactionary rather than preventive, and frequently lag behind scientific evidence for possible or probable harm. For example, it is ironic that although the toxicity of lead has been recognized for millennia, it remains "one of the most important pediatric diseases and is a major cause of behavior disorders and school failure" (Needleman & Landrigan, 1994, p. 79). Further, of the 140 currently registered pesticides that are known neurotoxicants, only 12 have been specifically tested for potential impacts on child development.

Virtually all areas of psychology are impacted in some way by the relationship between toxins and child development, or could contribute to reducing the problem. To provide just a few examples, educational psychologists are increasingly confronted with special needs children. Clinical and neuro-psychologists as well as psychiatrists are increasingly called to testify in toxic tort cases (i.e., suits involving psychological dysfunction as a result of toxic exposures). Neuropsychologists can and have developed measures of the sometimes subtle deficits associated with chemical exposures, and psychologists in general are particularly well-trained for developing tools to assess impaired behavioral and cognitive function. The science of psychology can illuminate the empirical dimensions of behaviors that contribute to and result from environmental threats including toxins. Health, biological, clinical, and social psychologists can help examine the stress response associated with living in polluted environments, and inform strategies to more effectively cope with such challenges (behaviors that minimize exposure, engaging in community activism, and so forth). Such efforts are critical, as behavioral and social psychology has shown us that succeeding and thus feeling empowered on one level often inspires people to work at a more global level.

In sum, regardless of what area in psychology appeals to you, chances are

pretty good that this is an issue that will affect you, or that you could help to resolve. Certainly, each of us can make personal choices that reduce the toxicity of our environment: Buy organic foods (i.e., those that have not been treated with chemical pesticides and fertilizers); refrain from using pest control products in our own homes and gardens; avoid plastics that contribute to toxic pollution in their manufacture and that release toxic gases (i.e., bottled water, and other "disposable" plastic products); and reduce paper use and waste (paper manufacturing processes contribute to environmental dioxins - probably the most dangerous substances to child development and public health in our contemporary world. A safe and sustainable future depends on all of us doing our part!

### References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (2004). *About developmental disabilities*. Retrieved March 25, 2004 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/default.htm>.
- Landrigan, P.J., Kimmel, C.A., Correa, A., & Eskenazi, B. (2004). Children's health and the environment: Public health issues and challenges for risk assessment. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 112 (2), 257-265.
- Needleman, H.L., & Landrigan, P.J. (1994). *Raising Children Toxic Free*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Professor Sue Koger's paper, "Environmental toxicants and developmental disabilities: A challenge for psychologists," is currently under review for *American Psychologist*. She is the co-author of *The Psychology of Environmental Problems* (2004, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates) with Professor Deborah Du Nann Winter, Whitman College. She is the co-author of *The Psychology of Environmental Problems* (2004, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates) with Professor Deborah Du Nann Winter, Whitman College.

# Jobs, Internships & Opportunities...

Students, are you looking for a volunteer service placement? Interested in gaining experience with children in a non-profit setting? Volunteering at Liberty House, a Salem area non-profit Child Abuse Assessment Center, will give you valuable experience applicable to careers in a variety of fields: psychology, education, social work, etc.

Liberty House needs you; please call today for your volunteer application.

503-540-0288

Can you file? Are you an organized person? Do you want to make money for doing these tasks? Professor Meredy Goldberg Edelson is looking for a work/study student who is interested in helping to organize some of her research articles in her newly cleaned and organized office!!

If you are interested in earning a few dollars by helping her out, please contact her <medelson>, x6133, or stop by her office (253 Smullin).



# Psychology has a New Administrative Assistant...

Elizabeth Martineau comes to us from the University of North Dakota, where she received her B.A. in International Studies with a minor in French. After spending a few years in North Dakota and some time in France, she is happy to be back in Oregon and looks forward to working with our Psychology students.

# And Now A Word From Psi Chi...

Psi Chi Wants YOU!

Psi Chi is the National Honor Society in Psychology, founded in 1929 for the purposes of encouraging, stimulating, and maintaining excellence in scholarship, and advancing the science of psychology. Willamette founded its chapter in 1952, and is open to all psych majors and minors who meet requirements. Applications will go out spring semester and induction of new members will be at the end of the year. Until then, keep your eyes open for posters advertising movie nights in October and November, where popular psychological thrillers will be shown followed by a facilitated discussion.

Questions? Check out the national website at [www.psichi.org](http://www.psichi.org) or e-mail Nicole at [nlucas@willamette.edu](mailto:nlucas@willamette.edu).



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**Please deliver to:**

Over-interpreting projective tests...

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