Greetings from the Chair
Trish Devine

There are times when I really wish I was a Badger! Perhaps it would be better stated as, there are times I wish I was a real Badger. I’ve been at the UW and in the Department of Psychology for a long time and I love the UW and our department. I’m extremely loyal to the Badgers and at games love to sing along to “Varsity.” I even believe that “When You Say WISCONSIN, You’ve Said It All.” But the reality is that I’m not a real Badger. I didn’t go to school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and what I’ve discovered over the years is that there is something truly special about those who attend UW-Madison. They are the real Badgers! And real Badgers are Badgers for life! They are extremely loyal to the university and proud to have earned their degrees here. In addition, they possess other characteristics that I was told was true of UW students when I first arrived on campus – UW students work hard and they play hard.

This was never more evident to me than in October when the department hosted its first annual alumni weekend during the university’s homecoming celebration. The weekend was filled with a range of activities. Some of the activities allowed visiting alums to catch up on the department and the latest research in the department (more work related). Other activities involved visiting the Terrace and enjoying Babcock ice cream, attending a tailgate party, and cheering for the Badgers at the homecoming football game (more play related). In true University of Wisconsin fashion, they wanted both sets of experiences and participated in them fully.

Despite the age differences and the different occupational pathways pursued, their fondness for our university and department was extremely similar. The time they spent at the University of Wisconsin and in the department left an indelible mark on them. They reminisced about how their major in psychology prepared them well for their careers, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking. This was as true for those who pursed psychology as a career and for those who pursued careers in law, medicine or business. They also reflected on how earning a degree at the UW and in our department has opened doors for them. The bond they have in common by virtue of having earned their degrees in our department runs very deep, and their pride in being a Badger was unmistakable.

The weekend was a great deal of fun. Personally, I enjoyed meeting and talking with the visiting alumni. I loved hearing about their time in Brogden Hall and what they remembered as being special about the time they spent here. I felt excited that I contributed to the environment many of them remembered so fondly. I truly feel that by being a faculty member at this university and in this department for so many years, I’m part of something incredibly special.

In many ways, my longevity here at the UW probably allows me to truthfully claim, I’m a Badger. I left the alumni weekend, however, wishing I was a real Badger.

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DISCOVER Alumni Homecoming Weekend, 2013

A BIG thank-you to everyone who participated in our first-ever Psychology Alumni Homecoming Weekend! It was a huge success. The two-day event allowed our alumni to remember the great times they had as students, reconnect with campus and the department, and build new memories and relationships for years to come.

Alumni reflections on the event:

“The first annual Wisconsin Psychology reunion—what a terrific idea! I enjoyed and treasure the memory of every part of the event-packed weekend from the department activities on Friday through the tailgate party and homecoming game. Go Badgers!” – Richard R. Bootzin, B.S. ’63, Professor of Psychology, University of Arizona

“The alumni weekend was a great experience to reconnect with faculty, meet other psych alumni, and cheer on Bucky! It was a proud reminder of how influential the psych program was while I was a student and how it continues to thrive today.” – Sarah Wise, B.A., ’11

“My husband and I had a fabulous time at the Alumni Weekend. Not only was it great to visit all of our old favorite places and see how Madison has grown, but it was wonderful to go back to the Psychology Department, learn about everything that is happening there, and network with other alumni. I was particularly impressed with the professors we met and the research they are doing, and so enjoyed the unique access and insight into the department. It was a weekend full of all of the best parts of our time at Madison, and a great reminder of what we love about it. I can’t wait to go back next year.” – Tamar Kelber
Upcoming Student-Alumni Gathering

The Department of Psychology, along with student organizations Psi Chi and Psych Club, is happy to announce that the sixth annual Student-Alumni Networking Event will take place on Thursday, April 3rd from 6-8:30 p.m. in the new Union South. The Student-Alumni Event was developed to help students see the opportunities available to them as a graduate with a Psychology major. Often this can seem elusive to students, but talking and asking questions to alumni who have been in their position can help in their exploration. Last year’s event welcomed 30 alumni and 75 students. If you are interested in participating in this year’s Student-Alumni Networking Event, or have any questions, please contact Stephanie Osborn at saosborn@wisc.edu.

Join Us Next Year!

While the date for the 2014 Homecoming Weekend has not been set, our best guess is that it will be October 11-12. Please keep your calendar clear so you can join us next year. If you would like to be part of the UW Psychology Homecoming planning group, please contact Amanda Riek at psychalumni@psych.wisc.edu.
Prejudice and discrimination have serious consequences – they lead to depression, stress, anxiety, aggressiveness, low self-esteem, low life-satisfaction, and poor performance. They are also common – 34% of Americans report exposure to major lifetime discrimination, and 61% report exposure to day-to-day discrimination. The research conducted in my laboratory seeks to address these issues by examining ways to promote diversity and to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

A recent literature review came to the conclusion that social scientists know surprisingly little about how to reduce prejudice. Many researchers have great ideas, but few interventions have been evaluated systematically. In 2009, social scientists had conducted only 11 randomized field experiments with a non-student population in which the effectiveness of a prejudice intervention had been evaluated empirically.

Based on an analysis of the scientific literature, my collaborators and I proposed a new prejudice reduction method several years ago. By making salient how variable/heterogeneous members of a given out-group really are, we reasoned, it should be possible to reduce people's negative feelings toward that group. We tested this idea in more than 20 laboratory and field experiments with more than 3,000 participants. In all experiments, participants were randomly assigned to either an intervention condition or a control condition.

We experimentally manipulated “perceived variability” of the out-group in a variety of ways. In some studies, for example, we used a poster that displayed 12 Arab (or African American) individuals and associated them with a variety of positive and negative characteristics. Our outcome measures included self-report scales of feelings toward the out-group, social distance measures, evaluation of job candidates, behaviors toward confederates, and implicit measures of prejudice. The experiments testify to the effectiveness of our intervention: prejudice and discrimination can be reduced by making salient the perceived variability of an out-group.

A recent study with over 700 organizations in the U.S. showed no correlation between whether companies had diversity-training programs for their employees and the number of women and minorities they had hired as managers. This result is not surprising. Most of these programs are not based on the scientific literature on intergroup relations, and virtually none of them is empirically evaluated.

Our research has important implications for diversity training and anti-discrimination interventions. Companies see diversity no longer as an obligation, but as an opportunity that helps them reach their business objectives. Schools want to prepare their students for a multi-cultural workforce. And communities are concerned about health disparities between Whites and historically underrepresented minorities.

In my lab, we develop and rigorously test diversity interventions that “work.” If you want to learn more please consult my lab web page (http://psych.wisc.edu/brauer/index.html) or write to me at brauer2@wisc.edu.

Meet the Faculty: Markus Brauer

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Coe Honored for Teaching Excellence

We are pleased to announce Professor Christopher Coe as a recipient of a 2013 UW System Regents Teaching Excellence Award. For the past 25 years Professor Coe's sustained teaching excellence and commitment to students stood out as unique and worthy of recognition. The novelty and excellence of his instruction is built upon the fact that he is a premier researcher in his field. His studies have contributed much to our understanding of the relationship between mind and body, and between the brain and the immune system, over the last several decades.

Professor Coe's flagship class is Psychology 450, Animal Behavior – The Primates. The course content and instructional style are one-of-a-kind, and it serves a vital role both for our majors and the university as a whole. Every year this class attains its maximum enrollment of 350 students, as it has done since 1985, even though officially categorized as an elective course. Its popularity is a tribute to the charisma and oratory skills of Professor Coe, as well as the distinctive material, which is unlike any other course offered at UW-Madison or elsewhere in the country. The content builds on a wealth of interdisciplinary knowledge Professor Coe has acquired over a lifetime of study of nonhuman primates, enabling students to ponder how the behavior and biology of our closest animal relatives can inform our understanding of the human condition. The topics range from the antecedents of love and parental bonding to the causes of aggression and conflict, as seen through what we know about primates. Topical issues such as the ethics of using sentient animals in research are openly considered.

Professor Coe describes his pedagogical style as designed to "foster the abiding belief that through the knowledge, we gain wisdom, meaningful to us as individuals and as citizens invested in our community.” Indeed, he challenges his students to extend their learning and consider broader implications of what they are learning in class. Former student Rachael Jocewicz explains: "He guided us through the complex and sometimes tricky waters of what connections could be made between the behavior of primates and the behavior of our own species. It was one of the things I loved about the Primate Behavior class – I learned information, but also learned how it could be applied in various contexts I initially did not think of. He wanted us to understand what could be done with what we were learning.”

Professor Coe's very special teaching contributions go considerably further and include an equally popular, upper-level class on the Psychobiology of Stress and Coping. This course is just as unique and as multidisciplinary. The content is built on the foundation of Professor Coe's lifetime of scholarship in the fields of health psychology and behavioral medicine. The subject matter enables students to learn about the importance of the behavioral influences on our health, covering physiological mechanisms and pathways and the health-promoting or disease-causing impact of lifestyle decisions. It addresses broad public policy issues of relevance for the promotion of population health, such as the current concern about obesity as a risk factor for diabetes, as well more personally germane topics, including more effective means to cope with life's adversities and cognitive-behavioral interventions to facilitate stress management.

Professor Coe's love for teaching is apparent the moment you walk into his classroom from his lively classroom discussions to his talent for mimicry of primate communication. Rachael continues her positive appraisal: "He has the remarkable ability to make the material fascinating, and to instill some of his passion to others.” Always generous with his time, providing invaluable academic and career advice to students, as well as empathic support, Professor Coe continues to be an invaluable member of the Psychology Department.
Graduate Student Spotlight: Erica Wojcik

If you've ever been around a toddler, you've probably noticed how quickly they learn new words. I've always been intrigued by how babies learn language, and this fascination led me to the Psychology program at UW-Madison, where I am advised by Drs. Jenny Saffran and Mark Seidenberg. My research focuses on early cognitive development; specifically, I'm interested in how young children learn words.

In one line of work, Dr. Saffran and I are investigating what information toddlers learn when they hear a word for the first time. While word learning is typically thought of as figuring out which labels go with which referents (for example, that the sound “dog” refers to furry animals that bark), there is much more information that toddlers could be learning about words every day. For example, as adults, we know that cows look more similar to horses than they do to snakes, and that they are more likely than bears to be seen on a farm. This type of word knowledge helps us to use and understand language, and to interact with the world. I wanted to know when infants begin to learn this type of information. Do they encode these complex word relationships right off the bat? Or does a new word have to be robustly learned before other information is encoded?

How do you tap into toddlers' complex language knowledge? After teaching 2-year-olds several new words, we used a novel method to measure their interest in listening to different pairs of those words. By measuring toddlers' interest in different word pairs, we were able to assess what they learned about the words without explicitly asking them—young children often know much more than they can tell you! We found that when toddlers hear new words for the first time, they encode not only what words refer to, but also the visual relationships between the words. For example, if a toddler is learning “dog,” “cat,” and “shoe,” they encode not only what those individual words mean, but also that “dog” and “cat” look more similar to each other than “dog” and “shoe.” From their very first exposures to new words, toddlers are learning much more information than we previously thought.

My additional research projects focus on other questions surrounding early word learning, such as whether infants are sensitive to the contexts in which words are used. I am also currently working on my dissertation, in which I am exploring how the specificity of word knowledge changes over time. There's still much to figure out about how we learn language, and I'm excited to continue to explore this complex problem.

For more information about my research, please visit my website: https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/ehwojcik/research/Home.html. Or the Infant Learning Lab website: http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/infantlearning/Welcome.html.
UW-Madison has a long history of local and global outreach. We are indeed proud of the many contributions of our Psychology undergraduates and alumni. Meet Shawn Harris, one of our talented undergraduates, whose community and campus involvement has shaped both his own identity and future career path.

As a member of the Badger community, I understood early on my responsibility to give back. I have always inserted myself in spaces where I could more thoroughly understand my privilege in being a student while effectively helping others deconstruct theirs. I got my foundations from living on the Multicultural Learning Community (MLC) my freshman year here at UW. This was a space that afforded me the opportunity to explore my identity in the company of people from all walks of life. We built organic relationships that fostered a safe space where we lived and learned with one another. Having a strong support system in the community I had established gave me the courage to make an impact in other spaces.

One way I was able to do this was by co-founding the Wisconsin Association of Black Men along with some colleagues. WABM has a focus on intergenerational mentorship to understand the issues faced by diverse populations. All the while, I was exploring these issues in my classes as a psychology major. I took a strategic blend of socially and scientifically focused courses to more effectively inform my perspective on diversity and multi-culturism, areas that are recently gaining attention in the field. It is my experience with the Psychology Department faculty and peers that kept me encouraged in my work and for those folks to remind me that my impact should reach beyond the campus.

I had been working with Madison-area high-school students since my tenure at UW had begun at a non-profit on Madison's Southside. The Pre-College Enrichment Opportunity Program for Learning Excellence (PEOPLE), which serves students from underrepresented populations from all over Wisconsin by exposing them to the college experience early on, provided a chance for me to be at the front lines of how students navigate identity construction and negotiate the institutions that interact with their daily lives. I led "real talk sessions" to facilitate a dialogue around challenges that my students faced, like peer pressure and the fears of adulthood. Interacting with students who come from similar backgrounds as myself is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in my college career.

When I went into my Psychology advisor's office my sophomore year asking about ways to gain counseling experience, she pointed out that I was already off to a great start. To my surprise, virtually all of the work I was doing with my high-school students was developing the skills I needed as a counselor, like group facilitation of important discussions. From that meeting, she challenged me to continue to find ways to parallel my involvement on campus and in the community with my career aspirations. It was my passion for psychology and community building that has inspired me to pursue a career in counseling psychology.

I intend on offering affordable counseling services to disadvantaged communities, where the need is arguably the greatest. I think the family is one of mankind's oldest institutions but also one of the most problematic. I also look to debunk many of the myths around seeking clinical counseling that are often misinformed, especially in areas like the one I come from. Being a student in the UW Psychology Department has taught me to transcend knowledge and seek understanding. I posit that if we can address issues at the individual level, then we can begin to find global solutions.

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