Greetings former students and friends! It's hard to believe I'm coming to the end of my second year as Chair of the department. As I reflect on these two years, I'm impressed with how much we have accomplished. Working closely with Martha Alibali who serves as the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies and John Curtin who serves as the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies, we have pursued a number of initiatives to improve our undergraduate and graduate programs. In this column, I wanted to share with you the efforts we have made to revamp our undergraduate curriculum and how the changes we have introduced will improve the learning experience for all of our students.

In May of 2009 we held a faculty retreat devoted entirely to teaching and curriculum issues. During the retreat, we took stock of our current undergraduate curriculum and developed a vision for the future. We noted that our undergraduate curriculum, strong though it is, had not been updated in decades. As a starting point for discussion, Martha, John, and I posed two questions to our colleagues: What should a contemporary psychology major look like? What courses would you be excited to teach? We found that these simple questions led to an inspired discussion about our teaching mission. During our discussion, we reached consensus that this long-standing structure (1) does not adequately reflect recent changes in the nature of psychological science, (2) no longer meets the ideal of a contemporary major in psychology, and (3) should be enhanced to create a more stimulating undergraduate experience. We emerged from the retreat with ideas about how to revamp the curriculum that would enhance the pedagogical experience for undergraduate majors.

In revising our curriculum, we were careful to preserve those aspects of the traditional curriculum that have always served students well. We have maintained our foundation courses (i.e., Introductory Psychology, Statistics and Experimental Methods), large enrollment breadth courses (e.g., Child Development, Social Psychology, Abnormal Psychology), and small enrollment capstone courses focused on specific topics. One of our concerns with this curriculum, however, is that it does not create opportunities for our students to be exposed to a thematically coherent progression of courses. In the new curriculum we have introduced depth courses to follow breadth courses and precede the capstone courses. These courses will enroll between 80 and 100 students and would have TA-led discussion or lab sections. Under our new plan, a first- or second-year student whose interest is piqued by a survey course in Abnormal Psychology may subsequently enroll in a smaller faculty-taught course in a narrower topic area such as Personality Disorders, or Child Mental Health, before taking a senior capstone seminar in a specific topic such as Adolescent Depression. Similar progressions have been created in other substantive areas in the field (e.g., Cognitive Psychology, Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology). From a pedagogical perspective, this change will expand student opportunities to engage deeply with the substance of the discipline, and allow them to do so in a setting that (continued on page 2)
The UW-Madison Outstanding Women of Color Award was created to honor campus women who, in addition to achieving excellence in academic scholarship, have advocated for social justice in the larger community. This year, our very own Professor Diane Gooding joined the select group of women who received this honor.

As many of you are aware, Professor Gooding has been heavily involved in education, advocacy, and outreach activities through her volunteer work with NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. In the past, she has served as a board member for both the Dane County and Wisconsin affiliates. Whether giving presentations for people with mental illness and their family members, writing educational articles for consumer newsletters, or being interviewed about the signs and symptoms of mental disorders and emotional problems, Dr. Gooding’s goal is to improve the general public’s mental health literacy, and to replace myths and stereotypes with information and understanding. To that end, she has provided expert testimony on schizophrenia to the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health.

Dr. Gooding’s moving acceptance speech was a call to action for people to work towards improving the lives of socially disenfranchised groups, including, but not limited to, people with severe and persistent mental illness. Professor Gooding asserted, “The only thing more devastating than untreated mental illness is stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against those affected by mental illness. Through my teaching, my outreach, and my personal interactions, I try to encourage others to see people with mental illness as people first.” Congratulations, Professor Gooding! We’re very glad to have her as part of our community.

The undergraduates are not the only ones to benefit from the new curriculum – our graduate students benefit too. In parallel with our discussion of the undergraduate curriculum update, we discussed the need to provide our graduate students with a broader set of teaching opportunities than our traditional curriculum offered. In the traditional curriculum, graduate students did not have the opportunity to do any formal teaching in their area of specialty. Such teaching opportunities are, we believe, an important component of our students’ professional development. We have long thought that this was a limitation of our graduate training and are truly excited that our undergraduate curriculum update affords a natural opportunity to address this issue. Creating the TA-led discussion or lab sections with our depth courses will offer graduate students deeper and more engaging teaching assistant opportunities and will enhance their professional development.

We are excited about the new curriculum and the ways in which it will both broaden and deepen students’ understanding of the field and provide enriching experiences for all of our students. Let us know what you think of these changes. One of the most rewarding aspects of being Chair of this department is that I have had the opportunity to correspond with alumni and friends. Please feel free to drop me a note (chair@psych.wisc.edu). To provide us with updates on how you are doing, send Melanie Jones a note (mjones@wisc.edu) or an alumni “Shout Out.” We love to hear from you and about how our former students are doing! Until the next edition of the Update, please feel free to visit our website to learn about the latest department news!
CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY CLASS INSPIRES WORK ABROAD

ANDREW QUACKENBUSH, B.S., ’08

As an undergraduate, I had always had an interest in how culture affected history and civilization. When Professor Yuri Miyamoto first arrived in the Department, she offered a new course in cultural psychology. Needless to say, the coincidence wasn’t lost on me, and I registered for the course immediately.

In Professor Miyamoto’s class, we discussed the complex interplay of culture with psychological processes I had once thought universal. There was something about the class and the topic that enthralled me, which led to my joining Professor Miyamoto’s research lab, where I designed and conducted my own research project.

Through these experiences, I came to realize that the Japanese (as well as other East Asian cultures) thought very differently than I did. That fascinated me, and it made me want to experience concrete cultural differences myself. Prof. Miyamoto encouraged me to apply for the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme, a grassroots internationalization initiative by the Japanese government that places native English speakers as assistant language teachers in classrooms all across Japan. In 2008, shortly after graduation, I left for Japan to work in Ichihasama, a small town in Japan’s rural Tohoku (northeast) region to help teach English to young children.

Despite initial language difficulties, Ichihasama welcomed me and helped me settle in. In the course of two years, I worked with four wonderful Japanese teachers of English. I grew to love the rich culture of Japan, so different from my own. At the same time, I found the indirectness of the Japanese to be frustrating. Westerners – and speakers of English, more specifically – are used to speaking clearly and concretely. For the Japanese, this style of interaction is far too direct. As an American, I often found what was unsaid or implied to be as interesting as what was explicitly stated.

I vividly remember the day I left. I really wanted to hug my supervisor, Numakura-san, because she had helped me so much with my daily life, and I thought of her as my Japanese mother. However, culturally, I knew that would be inappropriate, so I had to settle for a very deep bow instead. Two years is a long time, and I left a lot of friends behind both from Japan and my fellow JET participants.

Growing up outside of Milwaukee, I never thought I would live abroad and explore the huge diversity of cultures in Asia, but my time abroad has changed me forever. Not only do I have a deeper appreciation for the Japanese culture and language, but I also appreciate group differences more generally. It wasn’t always easy to live as a visible minority in a Japanese farming town. Yet, the experience has made me into the person I am today, and as a counselor-in-training, it has given me a unique perspective on diversity.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Marlowe C. Embree (Ph.D., ’82) is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at UW-Marathon County. His research focus has to do with the relationship between personality and career decision-making, as well as the relationship between personality and student views of the “origins debate”. He also maintains an adjunct consulting practice focusing on career management and organizational development issues for individuals and corporations.

Clare Kennedy Purvis (B.A., ’08) is pursuing a Psy.D. at the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology (PGSP)-Stanford University Consortium. A five-year program, jointly administered by the PGSP and Stanford University Medical School Department of Psychiatry.
NEW CENTER INVESTIGATES HEALTHY MINDS

For many, the study of the human mind and mental health evokes images of individuals suffering from anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, or other mental illnesses. Research in these areas has led to a wealth understanding of the biological and behavioral characteristics of such debilitating illnesses, as well as a variety of effective treatment options.

Professor Richard Davidson, however, would like to broaden the way we think about mental health. While Davidson’s early work focused on understanding the biological underpinnings of emotion and affective disorders, such as depression and anxiety, his personal practice of yoga and meditation, as well as meeting with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, inspired him to explore the impact of positive emotions in promoting healthy minds.

The Dalai Lama challenged Davidson to more rigorously explore the impact of healthy qualities of the mind, such as compassion, kindness, and mindfulness, through a combination of behavioral and neuroscientific research practices. In 1992, Davidson launched his first study of the brains of monks during meditation and propelled his efforts to create the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds (CIHM).

Housed in the Waisman Center, the CIHM is the first research facility in the world to combine a brain imaging laboratory and meditation space under one roof. Stemming from Davidson’s research in contemplative neuroscience—the study of how transforming the mind through contemplative practices, such as meditation, can change the brain and body to improve quality of life—the Center conducts basic research to provide a scientific foundation for understanding the brain bases of a healthy mind, as well as translational research and outreach with the goal of cultivating healthy minds through contemplative practices.

Research has consistently demonstrated the plasticity of the human brain, even in adults. Because qualities such as attention, kindness, and compassion are regulated by neural mechanisms in the brain, they are subject to change through experience and training. Knowledge of how healthy qualities develop in the brain will allow Davidson and other researchers to develop interventions and strategies to help children and adults lead healthier and happier lives. “By developing and offering interventions for schools, hospitals, prisons and communities, we hope to create real change for society,” says Davidson.

Current projects at the Center include teaching Iraq veterans contemplative techniques to help reduce the effects of post traumatic stress syndrome, meditation-based stress reduction training for teachers in an early childhood care facility, and a drug-free alternative for treating children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder though attention training. This past September, Davidson and his colleagues launched their first study in the Madison public schools where they are training teachers and fifth grade students to better regulate their attention and their emotions with secular methods derived from the contemplative traditions. In reflecting on how far this research has evolved, Davidson notes that “The confluence of the basic scientific understanding of neuroplasticity along with the increased receptivity of the culture to contemplative practices and the clear recognition that new tools are required to help minimize suffering, provides fertile ground for our new Center to thrive. We look forward to working with groups in the local community so that our translational research efforts in Madison can become a model for the nation and the world.”

For more information about the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, please refer to their website, http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org.
One particular issue that has been the centerpiece of my research focuses on the extent to which there are gender differences in math performance. The age-old stereotype holds that males are better at math than females are, and the stereotype hangs on today. It keeps women from pursuing careers in science, mathematics, and engineering, and it also deprives the U.S. scientific workforce of many talented women. When we are competing against other nations for technological advances, we need all the talent we can get!

Is there any evidence to support the stereotype? Well, some studies find a gender difference and some don’t. Simply keeping a tally of studies that do and those that don’t quite answer the question—the studies often use very different methods and measures, they use different sample sizes, etc. A breakthrough in my research on this topic occurred when a new methodological technique was developed: meta-analysis. It is a method for quantitatively combining the results of numerous studies after extracting the relevant statistics from each study. And, it tells us more than just whether a gender difference is significant, it also tells us how large the difference is.

I published my first meta-analysis of research on gender and mathematics performance in 1990. The results were surprising. The gender difference was small, with one exception: performance on complex problems starting in high school. That was a big exception, because complex problem-solving is exactly what one has to do for a career in science or engineering.

In 2005, the then-president of Harvard made his much-publicized, controversial comments suggesting that women lacked the mathematical ability to function at the top levels in mathematics and science. Those comments inspired me and I applied to the National Science Foundation (NSF) for a grant to conduct three new meta-analyses on the question of gender and math performance. The result was three new papers, published between 2008 and 2010. One of them, published in Science, amassed data from more than seven million school children in the U.S., based on statewide testing mandated by No Child Left Behind legislation. The result? Absolutely no gender difference in performance at any grade level. Girls have reached parity with boys in math performance, removing one barrier to their full participation in careers in science and engineering.

This research and other meta-analyses that I have conducted led me to propose what I call the Gender Similarities Hypothesis—the idea that women and men are more similar than different on most psychological variables. That is a radical concept in psychology, which has feasted on findings of gender differences. But most of the differences are very small, and that is the more important finding.

I am also intensely involved in trying to solve the puzzle of why, by age 15, twice as many girls as boys are depressed, a difference that persists into adulthood. I have come to the end of my space for this column, though. If you are interested in more information on that project, please contact me at jshyde@wisc.edu.
Years before my first psychology course, my guidance counselor and parents were busily raising me to believe that improved understanding of one’s self and others is necessary for individual and collective growth. Restless with wonder at how different other dimensions of life might be outside of my native Wisconsin, I decided to study abroad in India. At the University of Hyderabad, I spent five months immersed in Indian culture, studying cognitive psychology, Indian philosophy and Hindi. There I first encountered yoga, in the classroom and on a mat.

What intrigued me about yoga was its alleged ability to reshape one’s world through changing one’s perspective. Its origins as a philosophy for the common man appealed to me as well and drew on many of the same ideas with which I had grown up. I began a yoga certification course for which I’d rise before the sun most mornings and bike to the campus yoga center. Through daily practice, yoga steadily quieted my mind and lifted my spirit, changing me in some deep, intangible way.

Having worked for several semesters in Professor John Curtin’s Addiction Research Lab, I was familiar with the more negative effects experience can have on a person. The type of chronic maladaptive drug use seen in individuals who suffer from drug and alcohol dependency devastates the mind, body and brain. Such drug use is frequently motivated by preexisting anxiety conditions which it temporarily relieves, but ultimately only further dysregulates. From my personal experiences with yoga and understanding of addiction, I began to wonder if yoga might also relieve anxiety and pose some benefit to alcohol and drug-dependent individuals struggling to maintain sobriety.

Thanks to a TATA Study Fellowship Grant from the UW Center for South Asia, last summer I spent six weeks visiting yoga therapy and research institutions as well as addiction treatment centers throughout India to study this question. My goal was to generate a rationale for the integration of yoga therapy into addiction treatment plans through examination of yoga’s benefits and current medical applications. In the future, I intend to study the psychological impact of mindfulness practice at the neural level, much as UW’s own Professor Richie Davidson does currently. I hope that identifying yoga and meditation’s contributions to general mental well-being will help generate a health initiative to integrate mindfulness practices into everyday life.

My experiences in India helped me to grow as a person, granting me personal clarity and professional direction. Studying abroad can provide unique insight into both one’s self and others and could be of great benefit any student of psychology.
Can compassion be trained? This is the question I have been pursuing with Dr. Richie Davidson and the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds as a graduate student in the clinical psychology program. Contemplative traditions claim that compassion is a skill that can be trained, like exercising a muscle. The Buddhist tradition has developed meditation techniques to increase feelings of compassion for others, and claim that if people practice compassion, they will be more likely to help when seeing someone in need.

Very few of these hypotheses have been tested formally, so we set about studying them in a rigorous way. People with no experience were recruited and randomized to either compassion or cognitive reappraisal training. The intervention was short and sweet: 30 minutes of practice a day for 2 weeks. The compassion group practiced wishing compassion for different kinds of people: a loved one, themselves, a stranger, and a difficult person. The reappraisal group practiced thinking about stressful events in a less negative way. Functional brain responses to images of people suffering were measured before and after training. Importantly, we also measured prosocial behavior with real-world consequences. Developed with Drew Fox, a novel economic decision-making task called the Redistribution of Wealth game was created, where participants could spend personal money in order to help someone who was treated unfairly.

The results show that after 2 weeks of training, the compassion group redistributed more wealth compared to the control. Furthermore, training-related changes in brain regions involved in cognitive control, emotion regulation, and empathy predict the increased prosocial response in compassion. Results are currently being prepared for publication.

This work supports the idea that compassion can indeed be trained. I hope it will have implications for improving relationships at the personal, public, and international level.
We have a long history of excellence in teaching and research in this department. To maintain this high standard we need support from our alumni and friends. Donations in any amount are greatly appreciated and go directly to supporting our students, faculty, and programs. If you would like, you may designate your gift to one of the following areas (please check one):

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