Hello again! The end of the spring semester brought some exciting news. For example, two of our lecturers, Bryan Hendricks and Caton Roberts, were honored for their outstanding contributions to our pedagogical mission. Melanie Jones was named a Wisconsin Teaching Fellow, Jenny Saffran received the NIH MERIT Award, and Richie Davidson received the Paul D. MacLean Award from the American Psychosomatic Society for Outstanding Neuroscience Research in Psychosomatic Medicine. Against this backdrop of good news, we bid a bittersweet farewell to one of our cherished colleagues, Colleen Moore, who accepted a position as Chair of the Department of Psychology at Montana State University. Colleen was a member of the department for 33 years, and though we wish her every success, we will miss her deeply.

We approach the beginning of a new school year with excitement and anticipation. The arrival of students to campus, both those newly arriving as well as those returning, is always energizing and reminds of the privilege we have in participating in their education and development. Adding to the excitement this fall is that the department welcomes four new faculty members including Paula Neidenthal, Markus Brauer, Allyson Bennett, and Shawn Green. Each of these extraordinary scholars will help us to maintain our strong national ranking and will enable us to broaden our course offerings for students. In addition, their presence will help to expand research opportunities for students. Our new colleagues will be showcased in upcoming issues of The Update. In the meantime, you can learn more about them by visiting our website.

This year, however, we also approach the new school year with some trepidation in light of serious budget cuts that led to deep cuts in our undergraduate program and we have general anxieties as state support for the university continues to decline. To achieve a mandated 8% cut in our budget, we had to cut all courses that do not meet a specific requirement in the major. This has meant cutting valuable and interesting courses such as the popular Inside the Criminal Mind, Honors Introductory Psychology, the Teaching Fellows Program, and internships among others. Any “extras” that enrich our program and broaden our students’ experiences and opportunities have been casualties of this round of budget cuts. We have been told that departments are increasingly responsible for fundraising and finding ways to fund enrichment opportunities for students.

Of course, we are trained to be scientists and not fundraisers, which has left us unprepared to assume this new responsibility! Fortunately, recently we have assembled a wonderful group of alumni and friends of the department to help us with fundraising efforts and to advocate for the department more generally. Led by Mark Laufman, the Advocacy Board is working very hard to raise money for the department. The Advocacy Board’s membership and mission is described in the article on page 2 of this newsletter. You will see familiar names of some who have long been supporters of the department and who have been featured in previous editions of The Update (e.g., Dave Weiner and Joyce Rosevear) as well as those who have reconnected with the department to support this important initiative. We hope that you will join the Advocacy Board efforts to raise funds to support departmental activities. Any contribution you can manage would be deeply and gratefully appreciated.
The Department of Psychology has formed an Advocacy Board of alumni and friends, which had its first full meeting on May 13, 2011. The Board is chaired by Mark Laufman (BS ’66), who lives in Madison and is a managing director of Robert Baird and Co.. Other members include Jerry Halverson (BA ’94, MD ’99), Amanda Riek (BS ’08, JD ’11), Joyce Rosevear (MA ’70, PhD ’74), Ila Rothschild (BA ’72), Sigmund Sattenspiel (BS ’61), Benedict Schwartz (BS ’62), Peter Shapiro (MS ’84, PhD ’86), Michael Smith (BA ’68, MA ’70, PhD ’73), and David Weiner (BBA ’54). Department chair Trish Devine and Director of Alumni and Friends Relations Janet Hyde serve ex officio on the Board.

Mark Laufman, in commenting about the Board, said, “I am very proud to be chair of the Board for one of the top psychology departments in the world and one of the best departments at the University of Wisconsin.”

The Board is already hard at work on finding ways to meet the needs of the Department in the face of declining State funding, and ensuring that it remains one of the top 10 psychology departments in the nation. The Board has taken on the task of raising funds for graduate students to attend scientific conferences, and for summer support in the year during which they study for their preliminary exams.

The Board has also formed a Building Committee (Michael Smith and Jerry Halverson, working with Trish Devine and Janet Hyde). Its goal is to help the Department with the many initiatives that will be required to make the new building a reality. It is estimated that the Department will have to raise 50% of the cost of the building from private donors.

The Department is grateful to these smart and energetic individuals who have graciously donated their time to the Department.
MEET THE FACULTY: VANESSA SIMMERING

From an early age, I was particularly interested in two topics that seemed completely unrelated to one another: psychology and mathematics. Before I even started school, I was curious to figure out what made people do the things they do—an important question growing up with three siblings who always kept me guessing! Once I began elementary school, it was clear that I had great aptitude in math, and it was a subject I loved working on. As I progressed through my education, I learned as much as I could about each of these topics, but never imagined I could combine them into a single career path.

I entered college at the University of Iowa as a psychology major, but continued taking advanced math courses as well. As I took more psychology courses over the years, I was surprised at the breadth of topics that were studied in psychology. My junior year, I enrolled in a lab course with a professor studying spatial cognition in children. At the time, I had no experience with children and no particular interest in development. Fortunately for me, however, the study we designed and ran that semester actually worked out! I was invited to join the professor’s lab, where I continued working on follow-up studies on this project, and it eventually became my first publication.

By the time I earned my BS at Iowa, I still wasn’t sure exactly what I wanted to do. I had enjoyed my work in the spatial development lab, but was also interested in other questions, like how children learn categories or how they apply their knowledge in educational settings. I spent the year after I graduated working as the lab manager of the spatial development lab, and by the end of that year, I was hooked. Not only had I discovered how many questions still remained to be answered about the development of spatial skills, but also I had found a way to combine the study of psychology with the complex math I had continued to study. My advisor, along with a handful of other researchers and collaborators, used a style of computational model called dynamic neural fields to understand cognitive development. These models rely on principles from non-linear differential equations to characterize the interactions of hypothetical sets of neuron and how they generate behavior in the lab tasks we use.

I continued my graduate training at Iowa, gaining expertise in designing developmental experiments and computational modeling as I earned my PhD in developmental science. Despite my broad interests in a variety of children’s cognitive skills, I became even more interested in continuing to study visuo-spatial cognition. My research now focuses on how children learn from the situations they encounter in everyday life—how their own actions help them learn about objects, if their knowledge is specific to their own experiences at first and only generalizes later, whether they have to explicitly learn how to link information about objects’ features with their locations.

The questions I’m currently pursuing in my lab assess spatial skills and basic visual memory. Using dynamic neural field modeling, my dissertation explored potential developmental mechanisms explaining why memory capacity is limited, and what causes it to increase over development. My first study here at UW followed up on this question, looking closely at how the precision and stability of memory changes during early childhood, a period during which capacity increases from only 1-2 items up to roughly 3 items. Through modeling and empirical work, I’ve found that children are able to remember more items because their memory for each of the individual items is becoming more stable, a prerequisite to accurately holding multiple items in memory at once.

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LYN ABRAMSON: DEPRESSION RESEARCHER

What causes depression? For 35 years, my research has focused on answering this question.

Perhaps it is no surprise that I have tried so hard to understand depression. In 1959, when I was nine, my father developed what we now call severe Major Depressive Disorder. At that time, however, depression was not well understood nor even diagnosed. The doctors said my father had a “nervous breakdown” and gave him tranquilizers, which didn’t help at all.

I saw the great suffering that depression caused my father as well as the devastating effects on our family. My colleague Richie Davidson has said that my father’s depression was formative in my personal and scientific development, and he is right. When I entered UW as a freshman in 1968, I declared a Mathematics major. Although I enjoyed my calculus courses, something was missing. I found that “something” when I took Introductory Psychology. I immediately switched my major to Psychology and began my quest to understand depression.

The single best career decision I ever made was going to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania to work with two of the most influential clinical scientists of our time – the psychologist Marty Seligman and the psychiatrist Aaron (Tim) Beck. My graduate work provided a foundation for my research on “cognitive vulnerability” to depression. One of the well accepted generalizations about depression is that negative life events or stress often precipitate this disorder. According to the cognitive perspective on depression, the way in which people typically interpret or explain negative events in their lives, their cognitive styles, can “ramp up” or reduce the depressogenic effects of these events.

My colleague Lauren Alloy and I have shown that negative cognitive styles do indeed confer risk for clinically significant depression. Moreover, we have examined the developmental origins of cognitive vulnerability to depression and its continuity/change over time. With Ben Dykman, we explored the intriguing phenomenon of “depressive realism” in which depressed people’s negative judgments sometimes are more accurate than nondepressed individuals’ positive views. And, recently, we have begun to look at the relationship between cognitive and biological vulnerabilities to depression.

I am blessed with wonderful colleagues and students at UW. We currently are exploring the surge of depression, especially among girls, that occurs during adolescence. In addition, we are comparing prejudice and hatred toward others as in terrorism with the prejudice and hatred toward the self that can occur in depression. We also are comparing Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT) for depression with more recent mindfulness-based approaches. Finally, we are studying genetic and psychoneuroimmunological aspects of depression. I am achieving the goal I had back in 1973 when I entered graduate school – to understand depression from a multi-faceted psychobiosocial perspective.

The field of depression has come a long way since 1959, when I first encountered this disorder. I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue a scientific understanding of the “why” questions I wondered about as a child.
When I was depressed my senior year of high school I was encouraged to keep it a secret because depression is considered "shameful" in society. The shame led to bottled up feelings and eventually I hit rock bottom and attempted to take my own life. I was taken out of school and admitted to a hospital program, where the doctors had the group brainstorm alternative excuses to share with classmates regarding our consistent absences from school. At the time I found this shameful feeling normal, but looking back on it I can't believe that doctors added to the stigma.

After my traumatizing experience, I decided to take a stand for all those who were told they are a disgrace to society if they admit they are depressed. I have been an advocate for suicide and depression awareness through filmmaking and attending the Out of the Darkness Overnight suicide prevention walks with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) in cities throughout the country. Inspired by these experiences, I decided to take on a challenge and plan a walk to raise awareness and prevent suicide at UW.

Suicide is a major issue on college and university campuses around the world, and the second leading cause of death for 15 to 24-year-olds. Our intention in organizing the walk was to eliminate stigma, encourage students to help their peers who may be depressed and/or experiencing suicidal thoughts, and guide students with mental health issues to counseling at University Health Services. I searched hard to find someone just as passionate as I. I finally met Tracy Brookhyser (Fundraising Chair of Psychology Club and President of the Psi Chi Honor Society), who helped me plan the walk. Together, we sought help from Tracy’s fellow Psychology Club board members: Adina Alpert, Chris Glaser, Jesse Sherman, Jassamyn Karlovich, Katherine Thibeau. Once the planning process began, various other individuals from the Psychology Club, Psi Chi Honor Society, the Psychology Department, and UW National Alliance on Mental Illness Chapter (specifically members and Psychology majors, Rachel Steidl and Matt Vohl) came together and helped make the walk come to life. The more communities we were able to reach out to the better, since suicide is an issue that affects everybody regardless of your age, gender, sexual orientation, social class, or ethnicity.

One kick off event that Tracy organized was a wonderful meditation workshop with Professor Richard Davidson. At another great event, Professor Jeff Henriques facilitated a discussion after the screening of "The Bridge," which is a documentary about suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge. These workshops helped to raise additional suicide awareness before the walk.

The day of the walk Lori Berquam, Dean of Students, Kathy Kruse, Assistant Dean of Students, Danielle Oakley, Executive Director of University Health Services Counseling, and Albert Luccinii, a UW student and suicide survivor, spoke at the event and were thankful for our efforts to tackle such an important issue. Nearly 600 people walked to eliminate stigma and help save lives. We raised over $23,000 for the UW - Madison Campus suicide prevention resources and for the AFSP for research purposes. We received extensive media coverage in the newspapers, on NBC in Madison and Milwaukee, and were ranked by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention as the most successful campus walk in the nation. We were able to take a small proposal and turn it into a reality.

The motto for the walk was: ASK. LISTEN. SAVE. ASK the person if they are okay. LISTEN. to what they have to say, and SAVE their life as you guide them to professional help. For the years to come, we will encourage our fellow classmates and the Madison community to ASK. LISTEN. SAVE. For more
GRADUATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: MEGAN BROWN

My research is driven by my experience as a fifth grade educator through Teach for America. All teachers work with students whose linguistic skills and backgrounds vary. For example, many African American children are raised speaking African American English (AAE), which is different from the dialect used in schools (and later, jobs), known as Standard American English (SAE). The dialects overlap but also differ in grammar and in how words are pronounced, which may affect child-teacher communication and thus the impact of school experience.

My dissertation research examines the impact of differences in the pronunciations of words. The studies examine how rapidly and accurately children can recognize words that have the same pronunciations in the two dialects (e.g., LUNCH) or different pronunciations (e.g., TWIST, which is “twis” in AAE). I also manipulated dialect context: whether the experimenter used AAE or SAE in communicating with AAE-speaking participants.

Regardless of the dialect context, all AAE-speakers respond faster to SAE words than AAE words. Some words have multiple possible pronunciations between the two dialects, like twist and “twis.” When adult AAE-speakers are in SAE settings, they respond faster when hearing words with multiple pronunciations than they do for words with single pronunciations (e.g. lunch). After a lifetime of experience in two dialects, knowing that the word is pronounced differently in each dialect may generate more practice making sure the most appropriate version of the word is used. In addition, people who switch between speaking AAE and SAE use these same words to help communicate which dialect they are using.

However, a different factor was important in AAE settings, which are considered similar to home environments. Some words, when said in AAE, actually have multiple possible meanings (e.g. cold becomes “cole”, which can also mean coal.) When AAE-speakers are talking with other AAE-speakers, the number of meanings speeds word recognition.

Perhaps in AAE settings, AAE-speakers spend more time accessing word meanings because there are many similar sounding words with different meanings. In SAE settings, participants expressed concerns about not knowing all of the words, so they may be doing more surface-level processing to counter that fear. This level of processing means that words with multiple pronunciations have easier access and faster responses. Ultimately, speaking two dialects creates flexibility in how a person responds to words in different contexts.

RECENT GRADUATES MOVING FORWARD

Brian Drwecki will be working at Regis University in Denver as an Assistant Professor in Psychology • Shanta Hattikudur will be working at Temple University in Philadelphia as an Assistant Professor in their Psychological Studies in Education Department • Allison Jahn will be a Postdoctoral Fellow in Geropsychology at the VA Boston Healthcare System and a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Psychiatry at the Boston University School of Medicine and a Clinical Fellow in Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School • Heather Priess will be a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Michigan • Jennifer Stevenson will be an Assistant Professor of Psychology this fall at Ursinus College in Collegeville, PA • Christian Stilp will be working as a post-doc in the Electrical Engineering/Computer Science Department at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland
Amanda Riek spoke at the 2001 graduation reception, her remarks follow.

Congratulations to all of the UW-Madison Psychology Department 2011 graduates. I hope you are enjoying your time of relaxation before you embark on your next life journey, whether it be graduate school, starting a professional career, or re-claiming your parent's couch. I myself graduated from the UW-Madison Psychology Department with a B.S. in 2008 and received my Juris Doctor from the University of Wisconsin Law School this May. I have enjoyed my time catching some sun and playing volleyball in Texas before I begin serving as an Assistant State Public Defender in Baraboo, Wisconsin in June.

During my time with the Psychology Department I was a proud member and officer of Psi Chi and the Psychology Club and was also privileged to be a student for two years in Janet Hyde's Developmental Lab. I was very interested in Janet's renowned longitudinal research through the Wisconsin Study of Families and Work and was honored to receive the Hilldale Scholarship to complete my senior honors thesis in her lab. In addition to the Hilldale, I also received the Rosevear Travel Grant to help defray the costs of a summer program I did in Prague, Czech Republic on crime, law, and psychology.

Looking back, I am amazed by all that I accomplished during my time with the Department and the University as a whole given my limited financial means. I am one of the first members of my family to graduate high school let alone attend college, and a world-renowned university at that. As a freshman I was accepted into the FASTtrack program, which assists economically disadvantaged undergraduates through a combination of grants, work-study, and small loans. The help I received from FASTtrack, in addition to the Hilldale and the Rosevear Scholarships, afforded me the opportunity to be part of a University and more specifically a Psychology Department that consistently ranks among the highest in the nation and the world. Had I not received financial assistance, I would never have been able to attend lectures by distinguished psychologists such as Jenny Saffran and Richie Davidson, performed research side by side with psychologists such as Janet Hyde and Morton Gernsbacher, or participated in experiments for extra credit in Psychology 202 that I always thought I had figured out. Thankfully, my law practice is exponentially stronger then my experiment-cracking skills.

However, while I am forever grateful for the financial support I received, my strong affinity for the University and specifically for the Psychology Department is firmly rooted in more than financial support. My relationship with the Department began when Caton Roberts captured my attention in Intro to Psychology and sprouted an interest in an academic field I had never considered. My relationship was solidified throughout the rest of my undergraduate career, whether it be the last minute question-answering by Tina Winston in Psych 225, the dedication and enthusiastic guidance of my mentor Janet Hyde, the flexibility of Gary Malchow when scheduling me as an exam proctor, or each time Stephanie Osborn and Melanie Jones gave me a listening ear and a shoulder to lean on in the advising office. Even when I was awarded with the Psychology Department Excellence Award as a graduating senior, it was no surprise that the Department gave me a lifetime Union membership reflective of their desire to maintain a lifelong relationship with me.

Now, even with the enormity of debt that law school has so graciously bestowed on me, it is my turn to take the leap from supported to supporter. I know many of you are recent graduates, and I'm not proposing that you donate your life savings to the Department. It could be as simple and as small as making a donation for $20.11 to symbolize your graduation year. If all 350 graduates of 2011 made a $20.11 donation, the Department could use the $7,000 for a variety of things, including funding for undergraduate research projects, sending approximately 9 graduate students to conferences around the country to present their research and further their professional careers, or to provide summer support for a graduate student to help pay for necessities such as rent during one of their many summers as a doctoral candidate. Looking to the future, it could start to chip away at the large amount of funding that is desperately needed for a new psychology building, one that fosters intellectual and social growth rather than hindering collaboration and academic development.
The UW-Madison Psychology Department truly cares about its alumni and whole-heartedly desires to foster relationships with its undergraduates beyond graduation. Finances aside, there are many things you can do as an alum to stay connected with the Department. You can take the time to read each newsletter to keep a finger on the pulse of the truly astonishing things this Department is doing. Better yet you can fill out the form in the newsletter and let us know about the truly amazing things that YOU are doing. If you are in town you can attend the annual student-alumni dinner. Or if you move away feel free to stop by and visit the psych department when you return. One day, you might even be visiting a new building with men’s and women’s bathrooms on every floor, computers from the current decade, a real library, and research wings that foster communication and collaboration. No matter where life takes you, even if it is to your parent’s couch, my hope is that you build a strong, lasting connection with the Department and that you will always be able to call the Psychology Department your UW-Madison campus home.

If you have questions for Amanda, she may be reached at riek.amanda@gmail.com.

Simmering, continued from page 4
My second line of research is exploring how children learn to use the relative positions of objects to remember where something is—a skill that develops much later in childhood than the use of other types of spatial reference frames. We’ve found a dramatic change in children’s performance between 4 and 6 years, and a senior thesis by recent graduate Hilary Miller showed that providing 4-year-olds with language cues allows them to perform as well as 6-year-olds. We found a number of surprising results in these studies, and are currently investigating how and why language allows 4-year-olds to perform so much better.

Early childhood is a period of dramatic developmental change in a number of skills and domains, and in the future I’d like to understand how these different changes relate and depend on one another. I still plan to continue studying visuo-spatial development, but also want to move beyond these tasks to see whether the same types of developmental mechanisms can explain change in other behaviors, tasks, and domains. There are many exciting avenues of research waiting to be explored, and I look forward to continuing to ask and answer new questions in my lab. If you are interested in learning more about research on child development, you can find more information on the website I share with another new faculty member, Kristin Shutts: www.waisman.wisc.edu/socialspace. Lastly, if you have children and live in or around Madison, we’d love to have you visit our labs and participate in our studies!

Discover How You Can Help
As you may know, the University will be suffering tremendously in the next few years by continued budget reductions to higher education. Our Department has been hit hard by these budget cuts. In this regard, we need your help.

We have a long history of excellence in teaching and research in this department. If we are to maintain and build on this tradition, it is crucial that we obtain funds from alumni and other friends to help us support our students and faculty. Any amount is welcome; even a $10 donation will help us to achieve these goals.

For more information on how you can help, please visit http://psych.wisc.eduand click “Giving Opportunities” or contact Professor Janet Hyde, jshyde@wisc.edu, (608) 262-9522.