

InSight

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The Newsletter of the
Department of Psychology

SPRING 2023

SETTING UP OUR LEARNERS FOR Success as Psychology Majors



The demands and prospects of the psychology major are unique and challenging. There are many ways our majors can benefit from their psychology journey at UT and a wealth of possible opportunities for our majors to apply what they learn in their personal and professional lives.

The journey is not without its challenges, including employing wise strategies for lasting learning, as well as staying motivated, being productive, remaining well, striving to be resilient, and thriving along the way. For these and many other reasons, we are excited to now offer a new course, PSYC 245: Orientation to the Psychology Major.

The new one-credit course was first piloted during the spring 2021 semester and now runs most semesters to welcome and ready our students for success in the marathon-like journey of the successful psychology major.

The elective course, conceived by a team of our graduate students, faculty, and advisors within psychology, helps students achieve these important outcomes:

- Outlining educational options as a psychology major, including options for courses, companion majors and/or minors, and supportive research and other relevant practical experiences.
- Evaluating graduate-level educational opportunities available within and outside of psychology.
- Clarifying possible career options available to the psychology major, including the wealth of career possibilities that do not require a graduate education.
- Discovering empirically supported strategies for success as a psychology major, including those gleaned from the psychological science relevant to learning, memory, motivation, productivity, resilience, wellness, and flourishing.
- Benefiting from the resources, activities, and experiences that help students get the most out of their psychology major, including our Psi Chi and Neuro Psi clubs and other organizations on and off campus.
- Creating a flexible plan for success.

Currently, Bob DuBois, a senior lecturer and associate director of undergraduate studies in psychology, facilitates this course with the enthusiastic and creative support of graduate student teaching assistants along the way, including (so far) Micaela DiPillo, Esther Reynolds, and Hannah Shine. (all shown left to right above)

One of the best parts of the course is the opportunity provided for our new learners in psychology to learn from the experiences of an array of prior psychology majors. Each class session, we feature live interviews with guests from relevant faculty and staff across campus, as well as alumni with psychology majors.

Some of the many valuable things that students glean from these interviews include, but are not limited to:

- the challenges and even failures that might come along the way but that don't mean you can't be successful,
- the chance encounters and happenstance events that help students find their purpose in psychology (and the things we can do to make these encounters and events more likely),
- the wide array of paths one can take with a psychology degree, including the detours, obstacles, and new turns one might take along the way, and
- the passion we all have for the science and practice of psychology across many fields and disciplines.

Our goal in this class is to do all we can to help students see right from the start how they can engage with and benefit from these resources so they can do their best and get the most out of their learning experiences. We are blessed that many of our psychology alumni across diverse career fields and disciplines have visited this class so far. Your gift of just 15-20 minutes of your time to share your journey in psychology and the lessons you have learned can make a world of difference to our new learners. If you are interested, please email drbob@utk.edu so we can incorporate your visit into our fall 2022 Orientation to the Major course.

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T PSYCHOLOGY

Updates from Our Department

Greetings alumni and friends,

As the new department head of psychology, I wanted to share some exciting updates from the fall semester as we begin the new year.

Our undergraduate degree programs in psychology and neuroscience and our graduate programs continue to thrive. Given our large numbers of undergraduate majors and graduate students, we were given the exciting opportunity to hire five new tenure-track assistant professors so far. Our new faculty will join us August 2023.

Jasmine Coleman will join our clinical area. Her research focuses on the effectiveness of violence prevention programs, specifically identifying systems-level psychological and social risk, promotive, and protective factors that influence violence, particularly among Black youth living in under-resourced communities. Professor Coleman received her PhD from Virginia Commonwealth University and is currently completing her second year as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of South Alabama.

Cynthia Navarro Flores will join our counseling area as an assistant professor. She is currently completing her internship year at the Charleston Consortium of the Medical University of South Carolina and will receive her PhD from the Utah State University in summer 2023. Her research aims to increase our understanding of how adversity/trauma impacts the wellbeing of marginalized youth and families and examines mechanisms of resilience.

Lucy Mendez will join our clinical area. Her research focuses on the risk and protective factors accounting for marginalized and minoritized youths' mental and behavioral health. Lucy is completing her internship year at the Institute of Juvenile Research at the University of Illinois in Chicago and will receive her PhD from the University of Utah in summer 2023.

Alejandro Vasquez will join our counseling area. His research aims to reduce mental health disparities among underserved populations with a specific focus on Latinx families. Alejandro is currently completing an internship at the Charleston Consortium of the Medical University of South Carolina and will receive his PhD from Utah State University in summer 2023.

Alejandro Vélez Meléndez will join our neuroscience and behavior area. His research is on the evolution of communication in animals, with a focus on sensory ecology. He received his PhD from the University of Minnesota and is coming to us from a faculty position at San Francisco State University. We are thrilled to have these outstanding scholars join the department in August!



GINA OWENS
Professor and Head

We had several important faculty transitions in the department last year. We would first like to gratefully acknowledge Deborah Welsh for her tremendous service as department head for ten years. She made significant changes in the department during her term as head and has left a lasting, positive mark on the department in ways too numerous to list

here. Gordon Burghardt also retired in May 2022 after 54.5 years as a member of the Departments of Psychology and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. You can see photos from Gordon's retirement celebration in this newsletter.

In addition to updates with our faculty, we also want to welcome three new staff to our department. Sharon Sparks joined the department in May 2022 as a financial associate and came to us from across campus in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries. Susan Hawthorne joined us in August as administrative specialist assisting with human resources tasks in the department and works with our graduate programs. Susan was previously a senior interactive media specialist at Scripps, Inc. Finally, Andy Cross is our new business manager in the department. Andy previously served as the assistant director of financial aid at Chattanooga State Community College and holds a PhD in educational leadership from ETSU.

We are sad to report that since our last newsletter, three faculty members of the psychology department have passed away: Jenny Macfie, John Malone, and Howard Pollio. Jenny Macfie was a professor in the clinical program and made important contributions to our understanding of borderline personality disorder and developmental psychopathology. Howard Pollio was retired and was a professor in the experimental psychology program. He was internationally recognized for his phenomenological approaches to behavior, including the study of humor. Gordon Burghardt writes about John Malone in this newsletter.

Finally, as you may have heard, the Chancellor announced in fall that the College of Arts and Sciences will move to a divisional structure, with three divisions: Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Social Sciences. Each division will have a divisional dean who will report to the executive dean of the college. Task forces have been formed to assist the executive dean in determining the most effective means of organizing processes and communication within the college under this new structure, which will officially be in place by July 1, 2023. We will keep you updated on the progress of this transition.

It is our pleasure to share these exciting developments with you as we embark on a new year and new semester. We hope you are healthy and well. Please stay in touch. Go Vols!



Tierrany McNamee



Madison Kalb



Elliot Brooks

Departmental Research Assistantships in Psychology

The Departmental Research Assistantship (DRA) program is a new Student Success Grant-funded partnership—between Undergraduate Research & Fellowships (URF) and academic departments across UT/UTIA—designed to increase research experiences for undergraduate students. Additionally, the DRA program aims to strengthen relationships and communication between URF and all academic departments, to improve recognition of the role of undergraduate research faculty mentors, and to measure student demand for undergraduate research opportunities and the supply of opportunities available across campus.

In spring 2022, its pilot semester, the DRA program supported 64 undergraduates, each of whom was hired by an academic department to work as a paid student assistant on a faculty research or creative project. Three of these students were in psychology - Tierrany McNamee (working with Sarah Lamer), Madison Kalb (working with Kalynn Shulz), and Elliott Brooks (working with Kristy Allen).

Tierrany McNamee began the semester as a research assistant in Professor Sarah Lamer's Social Perception and Cognition (SPAC) lab. She's assisted with data collection on a visual perception study about how people see faces and coded news articles about sexual assault to understand what kinds of stories get featured and why. Tierrany also contributed to the SPAC lab's monthly Snack n' Unpack journal club where graduate and undergraduate students discuss current research papers of interest.

Madison Kalb is investigating the adolescent development of the basolateral amygdala, a brain region central to emotional and behavioral responses to stress. A hallmark of adolescent development is the onset of gonadal secretions of testosterone in males, and estradiol in females. Using rodent models, Madison is testing whether gonadal steroid hormones facilitate basolateral amygdala development during adolescence. Madison looks forward to presenting her findings at Eureka later this spring.

Elliot Brooks was a research assistant in the Families, Anxiety, Cognition, and Treatment (FACT) lab. In her role, Elliot was involved in a study with mothers and their children that aimed to understand factors involved in the intergenerational transmission of anxiety. Elliot trained to collect and code mobile eye-tracking data to inform research in this area.

If you are interested in learning more about the DRA program, please contact URF's faculty director, Erin Darby, at edarby1@utk.edu.

The Psychology Graduate Student Association

Our aims are to:

BUILD COMMUNITY - The mission of the Psychology Graduate Student Association (PGSA) is to enhance the experience of each graduate student at UT, by promoting intradepartmental and extracurricular collaboration and scholarship, providing support and opportunities for graduate student personal and professional development, and facilitating greater social engagement among graduate students. We try to get together regularly to organize, but also to hike and socialize.

INCREASE REPRESENTATION - PGSA will also serve as the collective voice and power of the psychology department graduate student body in interactions with the university administration and faculty. In doing so, PGSA will take great care to listen to all the diverse needs of our membership, and provide support and representation at the individual, group, and systems levels.

INCREASE FUNDING - We also provide financial support, when we are able, to the psychology graduate students in their research endeavors (i.e., travel grants for conference attendance) and professional development (i.e., workshops, trainings, etc.). We lost a lot of our membership recruitment and fundraising opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic years, so the funding aspect of our association is in dire need of support.



The STARS Undergraduate Research Program Takes Off!

The STARS (Scholarly Trainees Acquiring Research Skills) is a comprehensive research training program in which students at the HBCU Tennessee State University (TSU) engage in cutting-edge psychological research with faculty and students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Launched as a pilot program in January 2021, the STARS program brings together excellence in academics, mentorship, professional development, and research training to provide students a cohesive cross-institutional training experience.

Students in the STARS Undergraduate Research Program gain invaluable professional development skills and career development training during weekly informal peer-group workshops led by Psychology faculty and graduate student mentors. Student success is supported by an individualized mentorship team consisting of faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate student peers.

During the academic year, students engage in online program activities for 10 hours per week. Specifically, STARS students conduct research, attend professional development activities, and communicate with mentors at UT via online platforms such as ZOOM. Students may receive course credit at their home institution for their STARS participation during the academic year.

During the summer, students are provided a stipend to conduct **full-time** research. If COVID-19 is a significant risk factor, students will continue engaging in all program activities online. When COVID-19 is no longer a threat, students will be provided lodging and a research stipend to conduct full-time research **on-site** at UT.

Five students are currently receiving excellent preparation for graduate-level research and their future careers through the STARS program. To date, this exciting program has been funded largely by generous donations to the UT Department of Psychology. Faculty at TSU and UT are currently working to secure federal funding that will sustain and grow the STARS program for years to come. For more information on the program, visit starsundergraduateresearchprogram.com.



Gordon Burghardt



Gina Owens



Deborah Welsh



Doris Grove



Gordon Burghardt retired from the University of Tennessee after spring semester 2022. He has been a faculty member in the Department of Psychology (and jointly in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology) for more than 50 years.

In the best sense of integrative research, for decades his studies have linked developmental and comparative psychology with ethological and behavioral ecological approaches. He has studied behavior from descriptive, experimental, and evolutionary approaches, applying developmental, genetic, molecular, psychophysical, neuroscience, comparative, phylogenetic, and modeling techniques, and has made significant empirical, historical, and conceptual contributions. We work now in an era of increased emphasis on interdisciplinary, international, and collaborative research – Gordon has been doing this for decades.

Gordon is now a professor emeritus and is still actively working and writing. In addition to his hundreds of articles in the primary science literature and dozens of chapters in edited books, he wrote the foundational book *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the Limits*, published by MIT Press in 2005. Very recently, he co-authored the book *The Secret Social Lives of Reptiles*, published by Johns Hopkins Press in 2021. His mark on the field and on our department is enormous, and we are so grateful for his years of service to this university.

To celebrate Gordon's retirement, we held a gathering at Spout Spring Winery in Blaine, Tennessee, in October 2022. Congratulations on your retirement, Gordon!

Welcome New Faculty!

David Sutterer is an assistant professor in the cognitive and developmental sciences research area of our experimental psychology program. His research interest is in understanding how the brain supports detailed visual memories and how these memories impact future learning.

"Memory formation and retrieval is tightly connected to a host of cognitive processes and neural mechanisms," Sutterer said. "My research program encompasses the study of questions pertaining to perception, attention and memory in addition to how these different processes interact."

Jessie Tanner is an assistant professor in the neuroscience and behavior research area of our experimental psychology program and has a joint appointment with the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology.

"My lab addresses fundamental questions about the evolution of animal behavior," Tanner said. "We work primarily with acoustically communicating animals, including treefrogs and field crickets, to understand receiver decision-making and its evolutionary consequences."

Welcome to our new colleagues!



David Sutterer



Jessie Tanner

Social Justice and Psychology

In a recent special issue of *The American Psychologist* (Eaton et al., 2021), Patrick Grzanka, associate professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee (UT), and his colleagues advocated for a renewed and reimagined effort at using psychology to solve pressing social problems. They noted their call for this type of *public psychology* is not new, but echoes earlier discussions (e.g., Miller, 1969) of the "revolutionary role individual psychologists and the American Psychological Association (APA) should have in addressing social ills and promoting human welfare" (Eaton et al., p. 1210). In this special issue, Grzanka and Cole (2021) argued that a public psychology requires centering issues and perspectives that have been marginalized in psychological research and practice, including a social justice perspective. But what is a *social justice* perspective and how is it reflected in the work of the UT Department of Psychology?

In her 2012 APA Presidential Address, *Social Justice and Psychology: Why We Do What We Do*, Vasquez defined social justice as "the goal to decrease human suffering and to promote human values of equality and justice" (p. 337). Where psychology has historically had an emphasis on the individual (Orford, 2008), a social justice perspective encourages psychologists to also understand how "social realities are important determinants of distress that must be addressed as part of our efforts to promote the welfare of members of society" (Vasquez, 2012, p. 337). The social realities Vasquez (2012) described include discrimination and other forms of oppression, which psychological science has shown to be related to negative mental health (and other) outcomes (e.g., Lee & Ahn, 2011; Priest & Williams, 2018; Scheer et al., 2021; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). From this perspective, psychologists should be prepared to engage in competent and ethical research and clinical practice with individuals and groups and to use this research and practice to advocate for systemic changes (i.e., in policies and practices) to address social ills, reduce human suffering, and create a more equitable society.



Visit us online at psychology.utk.edu to finish reading this research spotlight, as well as additional news and updates.

John C. Malone 1942 - 2021 by Gordon Burghardt



Emeritus Professor of Psychology John C. Malone, Jr. died December 14, 2021, after a long series of debilitating illnesses that he fought with persistence and his characteristic wisdom and wit, until the end. He was an iconic, brilliant, sometimes irascible, but always stimulating colleague.

John was born November 20, 1942, in Buffalo, New York, and after service in the

Marines and graduating with a BA in psychology from SUNY Albany, went to Duke University where he received his PhD in psychology studying with the noted learning researcher John Staddon. Although most of his empirical research involved traditional operant methodology using pigeons, John was similar to his major professor in being an apostate Skinnerian, always thinking for himself and developing an unusual professional trajectory.

In 1971 John arrived at UT as an assistant professor of psychology. This writer clearly remembers his job talk in the old psychology department digs in Ayres Hall, where he, somewhat nervously, sweated profusely in the non-airconditioned building! John was promoted to associate professor in 1976 and full professor in 1982. From the beginning John was heavily involved in the department. As a beginning professor he became, in 1972, director of graduate admissions, serving in this role until 1985 and then as director of graduate studies from 1987-1990. The latter position existed neither before, nor after, John's service. When we had the department-wide generals exam, which all students needed to pass before being allowed to formally establish their dissertation committee, John chaired the committee, developing and administering the exam longer than anyone, from 1986-1992. John was extremely fair in this exam covering all areas of psychology, in spite of his lack of sympathy for what he felt were the fads, fancies, and outright unscientific nonsense too often promulgated in our field. These ideas were often expressed in humorous fashion in his MaloneNews newsletter, of which, somewhere, I have treasured copies. Some pages of the newsletter were often posted on his pigeon laboratory door in Walters Life Sciences Building.

John did not have a large number of graduate students, but they were rigorously trained and did innovative work, primarily on multiple schedules, stimulus contrast, and extinction. John served on numerous student committees throughout the department, including those of many of my students, where he was always prepared, thoughtful, and supportive. Coming as I did from an ethological background, where Skinner was far from revered, except for some of his methods, we had many fruitful discussions over the years

and we both benefited greatly. One of John's students, James D. Burns, applied then-current ethologically derived ideas of preparedness to show that the topography of pigeon pecking was influenced by both the reinforcer (food or water) and stimulus location (on floor or wall). James died shortly after taking a college job in Georgia, which affected John greatly.

Although working exclusively with pigeons professionally, John kept and observed many animals at his home, both wild (raccoons, turkeys) but also pet animals. These included rescues such as a crow that could not fly and a one-legged cardinal, as well as parrots, a green iguana (Voltaire), and some of Karen Davis's red-bellied Florida turtles. He frequently regaled us with updates and photos. He loved allowing the reptiles to swim in his outdoor pool, the birds and iguana to sit beside him at his desk, and so on. I often told him he should study these species not just pigeons, but he demurred.

John was well-regarded in behavioral analysis and his professional meeting talks were almost invariably at the Association for Behavior Analysis. He was as critically astute as an observer of his fellow operant colleagues as he was of psychology generally. His critical sense made him a valued consulting editor of the *Journal of Comparative Psychology* for many years. Although teaching in many areas, his favorite course was history and systems and history of psychology generally, which left indelible marks on hundreds of students. While he published many research papers and commentaries, his lasting legacy will most certainly be his historical research. His 1991 book, *Theories of Learning: A Historical Approach* was translated into several languages and adopted by over 100 colleges. His most ambitious and innovative work that will best keep his name alive in the scholarly world is his 2009 book, *Psychology: Pythagoras to Present* (MIT press). He dove into original sources using his knowledge of German, which was his undergraduate minor, along with his ability to see through Kant and bull.

John retired in 2016, a retirement marked by numerous trips to hospitals and specialists outside Knoxville, especially the Cleveland Clinic and Vanderbilt. His enthusiasm for psychology, history, and current events never flagged. He continued to publish until the end. In fact, he returned proofs of a historical review of Darwin and psychology just days before he died, co-authored with Staddon, his old major prof. Late last October he sent me a commentary on a reissue of Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. A book that he disliked: "It was really all I could do to write it. They love the book, so I was as kind as could be." My last email from John was on his birthday three weeks before he died. He ended with "I am trying to get better - but 79 years old today. Best, John." I greatly miss him, as I am sure will many of his former colleagues and students. Carlene, his wife of 54 years, his sons Jack and Michael, and their families have lost a singular and wonderful man who cared for them deeply.

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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"One that beareth a torch shadoweth oneself to give light to others."



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