Kia ora tatou

Yesterday was the shortest day of the year, and it marks the half way point of the academic year. Life can seem gloomy and university work feel tough, but don’t give up – never give up! Longer and sunnier days are ahead and new courses in the second semester are beginning soon. It is important to avoid being intimidated by how apparently difficult material may appear at first in any particular course. This is especially a problem for our compulsory (for Psyc. Majors) Stats/methods classes PSYC232 and PSYC325. I have been teaching Statistics and Methods for many years (including PSYC325 in our school), and I am only too aware of how easy it is for students to feel bamboozled trying to learn the material.

We counter this problem in several ways in our school. First, we employ outstanding Teaching Fellows to run the labs and work with students. These folk really do go the extra mile to support and help teach our students. This was illustrated recently by the PSYC232 class giving our exceptionally committed Teaching Fellow (Laina Isler) a bunch of flowers and an ovation for her work with the class. Such expressions of thanks are appreciated, believe me. Second, we have a cadre of experienced teachers planning and teaching both these courses, and we have had the same group teaching these courses for the last 5 or 6 years. This gives us the chance to hone the material, and act on the feedback from the students to improve our teaching and course structure.

Here are a few of Garth’s rules for courses: **Rule 1.** There is no such thing as a stupid question – ask for help from your Lecturer, Teaching Fellow, or Lab. Tutor. **Rule 2.** Come to the lectures (and/or view the recorded versions). **Rule 3.** You **must** come to the labs. **Rule 4.** DO NOT assume that because you don’t understand something that you are stupid. Stats can be hard, and understanding grows slowly over time.

Enough advice!! All the best for your studies.

Best wishes,
Garth Fletcher
CACR News

CACR Visiting Academic – Dr Radosveta Dimitrova

CACR was delighted to welcome A/Prof Radosveta Dimitrova to visit in May. Radosveta is a compatriot of Velichko’s, having been born in Bulgaria, but is now resident in Denmark (Stockholm University) and came to us via Japan where she is undertaking research. This is what it means to be a cross-cultural psychologist – you simply have to travel the world to get your data! Impressively Radosveta has not one, but two PhDs and is currently the recipient of the prestigious COFAS Forte Marie Curie Fellow. She has so many research projects on the go we had to wonder if she ever got time to sleep! While she was with us Radosveta presented to our weekly lab, gave a Colloquium talk, helped a number of our CACR students with their research, attended the Ethnic and Migrant Communities Engagement Summit and, importantly, was a valuable addition to our CACR ‘Beer Reviewed’ team in the Psych Society Quiz!

Migrant and Ethnic Communities Engagement Summit

CACR partnered with Multicultural New Zealand to stage a Migrant and Ethnic Communities Engagement Summit in Wellington on Saturday 28 May. The purpose of the Summit was to develop and grow relationships among ethnic communities and the theme was “I know what the media tells you but: Do you know who I am?” The Wellington Summit is one of five being held around the country. The weather on the day was truly awful, but that didn’t put off the participants and RWW501 was packed with representatives from the many ethnic and migrant communities in Wellington, along with associated NGOs, the Police, the Human Rights Commission, media representatives and Mayor Celia Wade-Brown who opened the Summit. Victoria’s A/Prof Allison Kirkman made a welcoming address and the keynote address was given by former Governor General Sir Anand Satyanand who attended with his daughter Anya; who participated on a panel alongside our own Prof Colleen Ward talking about ethnic community’s perceptions of each other and themselves. It was a very successful day with lots of free and frank discussion and new ideas for future initiatives.

Photo caption
From left to right: Tadesse Tujuba Borde, Mozhdeh Wafa, Anya Satyanand, Colleen Ward, Phillip Pithyou, the panel moderator Joris de Bres and the facilitator, Tayyaba Khan
3 Minute Thesis Competition

Registration is open for this year’s 3-Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition – but why bother? Wouldn’t that just take up valuable time and energy spent working on your thesis? Here are a few reasons why participating in this competition last year, in fact, improved the thesis process for me.

Perhaps most importantly, the 3MT provided me with a fresh perspective on my research. Creating a presentation that explains the why, how and what of your research in a way that makes sense to a general academic audience requires you to take an outsider’s perspective on your research, which I found very helpful. Condensing it all into just three minutes forces you to break the research down to its core – a difficult, but useful process. It requires lateral thinking to seek innovative ways of explaining your research from different angles; in doing this, I thought more creatively about my research and explored novel ideas.

The 3MT process also provides the impetus to hone your presentation skills. The three panel judges give detailed feedback on your presentation style, which is hugely valuable to any research student. And if that’s not enough to persuade you, there is BIG prize money to be won - a little extra cash can only make the thesis process easier. The winners of each faculty round (around 6-8 competitors) take home $200. The finals see the really big prize money up for grabs – our own Robert Michael took home first place last year with a whopping $3000. There are also cash prizes for second place ($1000), third place ($500), top international student, and honours student (each $250). The PhD winner also gets a free trip to Brisbane to compete in the Asia-Pacific competition, and the Master’s winner is flown to Auckland to compete in the Masters Inter-University Challenge.

Last year, I won my faculty round, gained 3rd place in the finals and 3rd place at the Inter-University competition, and came out of it with $700, a free trip to Auckland, a night in a nice hotel (including meals) and a bunch of merchandise. Not bad for just a few minutes of speaking. Plus, psychology seems to do really well in these competitions. We took out the top PhD and Masters prizes at Vic last year, and the three psyc competitors took out 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in the inter-university competition. So the odds are in your favour.

Now that you’re convinced, go to the PGSA website (www.vuwpgsa.ac.nz) to register!
- Rosie Moody

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1erg0UozzVoSelvH02WEk6orldb155cayczOZ8bael5U/viewform
http://www.vuwpgsa.ac.nz/notices/3-minute-thesis-competition/

At the end of May, Rebecca Olsen, Lorance Taylor and Anne Macaskill attended the Association for Behaviour Analysis International Conference in Chicago. All three contributed to a symposium about when and why people and animals make decisions not in their own long-term best interests entitled “Non-Optimal Choice: Gambling, the Sunk Time Effect and Academic Discounting”. Lorance presented results from his most-recent experiments for his thesis project. His talk was entitled “The Effect of Free Spins Features on the Persistence of Slot Machine Gambling”. Lorance received support from a faculty strategic research grant to attend the conference, and a senior presenter grant from the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis to cover his conference registration fee. Rebecca presented data from her recently-awarded master’s degree project. Rebecca’s talk was entitled “Discounting of Reinforcer Value and Student Success” Rebecca received support from the Beaglehole fund for travel expenses and a grant from the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis to cover her conference registration fee. Two other New Zealanders working in related research areas also contributed, and Anne was a discussant for the symposium. We received some extremely useful suggestions and input from people who attended our symposium that will contribute to our future research. We also had some time to check out the Shedd Aquarium and Navy Pier (pictured).

Scholarship Opportunity!!

The University of Western Australia is offering a scholarship opportunity to the value of $25-35k per year! (That is more than I make). A brief overview of the project:

Sopite syndrome is a little known and seldom studied condition, thought to be an early onset form of motion sickness. When humans are exposed to long duration, low frequency, low acceleration motion, they experience drowsiness, low motivation, low mood, and an aversion to work.

The successful candidate will have access to a motion platform at Western Sydney University and a state-of-the-art motion simulation at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The project will include fundamental research into sopite syndrome, using experimental and observational methods.

The successful candidate must have:
• A bachelor degree with First Class Honours, a Masters Degree, or equivalent publication record.
• A strong background in quantitative methods/statistics
• A background in Psychology/Applied Psychology is preferred
• Experience with experimental methods
• An interest in multidisciplinary research

To discuss the project in-depth contact: Steve.Lamb@vuw.ac.nz
**Current research in our School**

Ever since she was a young girl attending intermediate school, Sarah Goddard has been a keen observer of human behaviour. She was particularly interested in the development from the child into an adult, and how this changes the way adults see you, and the way you see yourself.

This fascination with human behaviour and development lead her to study psychology at Victoria University of Wellington. Sarah found that the style of teaching and learning here really suited her, eventually leading her to completed her PhD thesis here. Her thesis was supervised by Associate Professor Sue Jackson, with the topic of “pre-teen girls’ negotiation of sexualised pop music.” The focus of this research is the hypersexual behaviour of female pop stars in mainstream media, the pressure for girls to represent themselves in this way at a very young age, and the debate around the negative outcomes this could have for them.

Sarah applied a feminist, post-structuralist framework to this topic, and raised questions such as: why do our beliefs about girls lead us to anticipate negative outcomes as a result of them watching music videos, and why are we not equally concerned about boys? Is there an underlying fear of female sexuality that lies behind this?

Sarah used discursive methods such as focus groups, analysis of video data, and discussion with girls, investigating how language is central to how they construct meaning and understanding. As she says, “the real question is not what is the media doing to girls, but what are girls doing with the media?” To help answer that question, she asked the girls to make a music video to their favourite pop songs, then analysed the imagery and symbolism behind it.

One of her key findings was that girls are not simply passive consumers of popular culture who automatically internalise and reproduce what they see. Instead, they are critical observers who are very aware of their positioning in society as “at risk”, and the judgements they may be subject to if they are seen to behave in the same hypersexual way their idols do. They are not only consumers but producers of media.

Sarah hopes that her research represents a significant contribution to girlhood studies that will lead to a better understanding of how girls interpret and use the media. She also hopes that other people will produce research that challenges the positivist literature regarding human development, and puts girls’ voices at the centre.

Sarah’s advice to anyone who is considering embarking on a PhD is to find a topic they are passionate about, have realistic expectations about how long it will take to complete, and make sure they have a good support network behind them. Now that she has completed her PhD, she hopes to obtain a position in a university that will enable her to pursue her love of teaching, and conduct broader research on young people, development and well-being.
International student - Line Johansen

Line Johansen is studying towards her Master’s in psychology at the University of Copenhagen, and has recently completed an exchange programme at Victoria University of Wellington. Here she undertook courses in early cognitive development, discursive social psychology and cross-cultural psychology.

Discursive psychology was a new though enjoyable topic for her: “Ann Weatherall is an inspiring professor”. Even the course in cross-cultural psychology, which is a more familiar topic, offered different perspectives.

“How do you conduct research in the field, how do you investigate and operationalize phenomena across cultures. That has been an ongoing and rewarding discussion, which I wouldn’t mind pursuing in the future. Being an exchange student allows you to explore different ways of doing psychology, which I have been lucky enough to experience in the diverse courses I have taken.”

The strong research focus within the School of Psychology appealed to Line, and she particularly appreciated the opportunity to gain research experience as a volunteer in the Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience laboratory, where she carried out research on people’s unconscious emotional reactions using Continued Flash Suppression (CFS).

Line felt that the University of Copenhagen prepared her well prior to her exchange, and supported her by checking in with her regularly during her stay. She also had access to support from a “buddy” through Victoria International, but rarely needed it as the transition went smoothly for her.

There were some differences to adjust to. Danish universities have more lectures per course, and facilitated group work is common, while in New Zealand universities, more independent learning is required. There were also different academic conventions when it came to writing assignments.

However, Line appreciated the smaller class sizes at 400 level, which allowed her to build close relationships and engage in discussions with lecturers and fellow students. The lecturers knew her name, and provided her with detailed and personalised feedback on her assignments which has been contributing to a growing academic confidence. She also enjoyed having the freedom to choose her own approach to an assignment, and introduce her own literature.

Line has come to love Wellington during her stay here. She loves the compact and vibrant city centre, the night markets, the range of free events on offer, and the affordable good quality coffee (which she didn’t drink until coming here). Having set herself the challenge of doing a different walk each weekend, she has enjoyed the city’s many walkways and beaches.

Line will soon be returning to Copenhagen to complete her Master’s studies and take up an internship, which will take between twelve to eighteen months. She would highly recommend an undergraduate level exchange programme, or longer term study at postgraduate level as an international student at Victoria University of Wellington.